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FAME AND GLORY:
AN APPROACH TO INTERPRETING BEOWULF

by



LARRY McKILL

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Fame and Glory: An Approach to Interpreting "Beowulf", submitted by Larry McKill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I propose to investigate Beowulf according to the primary heroic motivation, the striving to win personal fame and glory, in order to demonstrate that the perspective of the poem is essentially pagan, not Christian. In Chapter I, I shall discuss poems that are acknowledged by most critics to be heroic and those which are undeniably Christian to illustrate the two distinctly different points of view towards fame and glory. Having established this basis of comparison, I shall examine in Chapters II, III, and IV respectively, the attitudes of Beowulf, Hrothgar, and the narrator towards these goals in relation to the outlook expressed in heroic and Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry. Through such an investigation, I hope to establish that Beowulf is an heroic poem and that its hero cannot justly be interpreted as an allegorical symbol of Christ, nor criticized for exhibiting a type of pride that is outside the heroic world of which he is a part.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Nayda Schultz of Waterloo Lutheran University, whose vigorous and enthusiastic teaching of Anglo-Saxon has been responsible for my continuing studies in Old English literature; and to Professor Frank Bessai of the University of Alberta, whose stimulating seminar on Beowulf and useful suggestions and criticism during the preparation of this thesis have been of inestimable value.

THEORY

The theory of the present experiment is based on the fact that the rate of change of the concentration of a reactant is proportional to the rate of change of the concentration of a product. This is true for all reactions, but it is only for first-order reactions that the rate of change of the concentration of a reactant is proportional to the concentration of the reactant. This is the case for the reaction between hydrogen peroxide and potassium iodide, which is the reaction studied in this experiment. The rate of change of the concentration of hydrogen peroxide is proportional to the concentration of hydrogen peroxide, and the rate of change of the concentration of iodine is proportional to the concentration of iodine. The rate of change of the concentration of hydrogen peroxide is proportional to the rate of change of the concentration of iodine, and the rate of change of the concentration of iodine is proportional to the concentration of iodine. This is the case for all first-order reactions, and it is the basis of the theory of the present experiment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Introduction	1
I Fame and Glory in Heroic and Anglo-Saxon Christian Poetry	3
II Beowulf's Heroic Motivation	17
III Hrothgar's Fading Glory	61
IV The Anthropocentric Attitude of the Narrator	74
Conclusion	92
Footnotes	94
Bibliography	99

Ure aeghwylc sceal ende gebidan
worolde lifes, wyrce se þe mote
domes aer deape; þaet bið drihtguman
unlifgenum aefter selest.
(1382-1385)

[Each of us must needs await the end of life in the world; let him who can achieve fame ere death. That is best for a noble warrior when life is over.]

cwaedon þaet he waere wyruldcyning[a]
 manna mildust ond mon(ðw)aerust,
 leodum liðost ond lofgeornost.
 (3180-3182)

[They said that among the kings of the world he was the mildest of men and most kindly, most gentle to his people and most eager for praise.]

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INTRODUCTION

That Beowulf is filled with enigmas is readily evidenced by the kind and amount of criticism which has been written on it since interest in Anglo-Saxon literature awakened towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1897, F. A. Blackburn, writing on "The Christian Coloring in the Beowulf," confidently asserts,

It is admitted by all critics that the Beowulf is essentially a heathen poem; that its materials are drawn from tales composed before the conversion of the Angles and Saxons to Christianity, and that there was a time when these tales were repeated without the Christian reflections and allusions that are found in the poem that has reached us.¹

Within recent years, however, the trend has been overwhelmingly towards regarding Beowulf as a Christian poem. In his article, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth,"

M. W. Bloomfield states that the poem

...belongs to the Christian tradition, not only in moods and ideals, and in occasional Biblical references, but, at least partially and tentatively in literary technique. An old Scandinavian tale has been changed into a Christian poem.²

Fr. Klaeber's cautious suggestion, "We might even feel inclined to recognize features of the Christian Savior in the destroyer of hellish fiends, the warrior brave and gentle, blameless in thought and deed, the king that dies for his people,"³ has been taken up by M. B. McNamee, an advocator of strong Patristic influence in the composition of the poem. In his paper, "Beowulf--An Allegory of Salvation?", McNamee states,

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original as the same appears in the records of the County of [County Name], State of [State Name], and that the same has been compared with the original and found to be a true and correct copy.

Witness my hand and seal of office this [Day] day of [Month], [Year].

Notary Public for the State of [State Name]

My commission expires on the [Day] day of [Month], [Year].

I wish to suggest in this study that as an allegory of the Christian story of salvation the Beowulf poem echoes the liturgy and reflects New Testament theological dogma.⁴

For the moment it would appear that the Patristic school had the upper hand--or, at least they believe that they no longer need to be circumspect in their assertions--for an eminent critic like Margaret E. Goldsmith, with unqualifying conviction, writes,

The 'paganism' of Beowulf died hard chiefly because of widespread ignorance of what Anglo-Saxon Christianity was like.⁵

It is my contention, however, that the case for an essentially pagan Beowulf is not, in fact, as dead as Professor Goldsmith would have it. Without trying to give any pretense to possessing Dr. Goldsmith's knowledge of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, I should like to suggest that an examination of the chief motives of an heroic warrior, the desire to attain fame and to win glory, is a meaningful approach which reveals the poem's essential paganism.⁶ Through a close study of Beowulf's, Hrothgar's, and the narrator's attitude towards fame and glory, this thesis will endeavor to show that the outlook in Beowulf is pagan, in spite of its occasional biblical references.

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CHAPTER I

FAME AND GLORY IN HEROIC AND ANGLO-SAXON CHRISTIAN POETRY

Beowulf contains no small number of words that carry the ideas of fame and glory; such words, for instance, as broeme, blaed, blaedagenda, dom, lof, maerðo, tir, prym, and weorðmynd. These words have been employed by Anglo-Saxon poets in poems that are clearly heroic and in those that are, without argument, Christian. This chapter will endeavor to show that the Christian poetry expresses a completely different outlook towards these ideas from what is evident in heroic poetry. Whereas the heroic deeds of brave men are used as spiritual examples by the Christian poet to direct men to recognize the glory of God and to seek their rewards in heaven, they form the center of the heroic poet's interest and admiration because they show the high level of achievement to which men themselves are capable of attaining. Establishing the different point of view that is manifest in heroic and Christian poetry will then serve as a basis of comparison against which the dominant outlook of Beowulf may be examined.

One of the chief characteristics of heroic poetry, Chadwick points out in The Heroic Age, is the hero's

constantly expressed thirst for fame, both during his own life and in after times....The summit of a hero's ambition is to have his glory celebrated everywhere and for all times....This love of bravery is held up as an incitement to bravery in critical situations. (325)

THE STATE OF NEW YORK, ss. I, the County Clerk of the County of Albany, do hereby certify that the within and foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original of the same, as the same appears from the records of the County of Albany.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of the County of Albany, at Albany, this 1st day of January, 1880.

JOHN W. BROWN, County Clerk.

ALBANY, N. Y.

He further asserts, "It is essential to notice that the object so much prized is personal glory" (329). In the Old English poem Widsith, accorded by most scholars to the early seventh century, the poet gives a catalogue of many heroes who have been well known because of their exploits and who are remembered in the lays of scop. The bard ends his poem with an explanation for the ready employment which awaits the travelling singer by men who wish to be praised by other warriors both during and after their lifetime.

Swa scribende gesceapum hweorfað
gleomen guma geond grunda fela,
þearfe secgað, þancword sprecap,
simle suð oppe norð sumne gemetað
gydda gleawne, geofum unhneawne,
se þe fore duguþe wile dom araeran,
eorlscipe aefnan, oppaet eall scaeceð,
leoht ond lif somod; lof se gewyrceð,
hafað under heofonum heahfaestne dom.¹
(135-144)

[Thus the minstrels of men go wandering, as fate directs, through many lands; they utter their need, speak the word of thanks; south or north, they always meet one wise in measures, liberal in gifts, who wishes to exalt his glory before the warriors, to perform valourous deeds, until light and life fall in ruin together: he gains praise, he has lofty glory under the heavens.²]

Personal glory through the performance of courageous deeds is what heroes seek. The esteem of their peers, of the warriors in their comitatus, is wished not only for the present but for the future. Glory is desired both for personal aggrandizement and as a means of gaining praise under not in the heavens after life "has fallen into ruin." It is evident that being lauded in heroic lays serves as a means of achieving some sort of immortality; there is no indication of heavenly praise and glory as a reward for virtuous action. Thus in The Odyssey, to cite an example from an acknowledged heroic poem,

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the soul of Agamemnon tells Achilles that his [Achilles'] was a happy death at Troy because he was mourned over and a splendid pyre and burial mound was prepared. He says to Achilles, "Thus even death...did not destroy your glory and the whole world will honour you for ever."³

It is by appealing to the opportunity for winning fame and glory that Hildegund is able to encourage Walter to battle furiously against Gunther in Waldhere. She exhorts him to be courageous, and she says,

[..] is daeg cumen
 þæt ðu scealt aninga oðer twega,
 lif for leosan, oððe l[.]gne dom
 agan mid eldum, AElfheres sunu.
 (8-11)

[Now the day has come, when thou, son of AElfhere, must do one of two things--lose thy life or achieve lasting glory among men.]

Again it is the glory among men offered as a reward for valorous accomplishments in battle that is valued. Hildegund anticipates Walter's taking offensive action by "pressing the fight further" (18) and winning fame for courageous deeds, for glory is won neither by fleeing to save one's life nor by mere defensive combat. Thus she urges,

Weorða ðe selfne
 godum daedum, ðenden ðe God recce!
 (22-23)

[Win fame by valiant deeds, and may God guard thee the while.]

Although the extant poem consists of only two fragments, there is no suggestion in these, that because Hildegund and Walter consider their cause to be just, they will receive glory in heaven if Gunther should succeed in killing them. Hildegund's speech indicates only

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the
theoretical framework and the empirical approach. The second part
presents the results of the empirical analysis. The third part
discusses the policy implications of the findings. The fourth part
concludes the paper.



The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the
theoretical framework. Section 3 presents the empirical
approach. Section 4 discusses the results of the empirical
analysis. Section 5 discusses the policy implications of the
findings. Section 6 concludes the paper.



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two possibilities: "lasting glory among men" in reward for brave fighting, or infamy and disgrace for cowardly flight.

Hildegund's urging Walter to fight bravely in order to win fame is similar to Hector's appeal to the Trojan warriors to fight like heroes. Encouraging his men, he says,

Trojans, Lykians and Dardanians who fight at close quarters,
be men now, dear friends, remember your furious valour.
Their best man is gone, and Zeus, Kronos' son, has consented
to my great glory.⁴

In each of these heroic poems, Waldhere and The Iliad, the glory to be won is clearly based in terms of earthly praise; each lacks any reference, either explicit or implicit, to the spiritual welfare of the soul or to the final goal of heavenly bliss in reward for noble and valorous deeds. The praise of mortals is sufficient stimulus for both Walter and Hector to fight bravely and not to fear death.

The attitude towards fame and glory in the Anglo-Saxon poems that are written from a clearly Christian point of view, however, is totally different from that expressed in the heroic poetry. Fame is gained for the Christian hero because his virtuous actions serve as an example for others engaged in their spiritual struggle. In The Fates of the Apostles, for instance, the apostles are regarded as glorious heroes made illustrious by their courage. The poet proclaims,

Twelfe waeron,
daedum domfaeste, dryhtne gecorene,
leofe on life. Lof wide sprang,
miht ond maerðo, ofer middangeard,
þeodnes þegna, þrym unlytel.

(4-8)

[There were twelve, illustrious in acts, chosen by the Lord, beloved while they lived. Wide through the world spread the praise, might, and fame of the Master's servants, no mean majesty.]

What is significant about the glory and renown gained by the apostles in the Christian poem compared with that attained by heroic warriors is that their glory is coincidental to their courageous acts performed in God's service; personal glory does not motivate them. The reward which is desired, as the poet says about James, is life everlasting.

Hafað nu ece lif
mid wuldorcynning, wiges to leane.
(73-74)

[Now in reward for his warfare he has life everlasting with the King of glory.]

The apostles are soldiers in Christ's troop who wage war against the devil and who fight to win the souls of heathens. What they cherish is "tir unbraecne" (86) [undying glory] with the King of glory, and death brings a welcome release from the tribulations of this world to enjoy the "hames in hehðo, þær is hihta maest" (118) [home on high, where is the greatest of joy].

In Guthlac, the Christian hero is accorded the familiar diction of oral tradition describing an heroic warrior, but it is clear that his mission is spiritual. His asceticism is diametrically opposed to the love for treasure and fine adornments of the pagan hero. The poet relates

þaet he his lichoman
wynna forwyrnde ond woruldblissa,
seftra setla ond symbeldaga,
swylce eac idelra eageana wynna,
gierelan gielplices. Him waes godes egða
mara in gemyndum þonne he menniscum

þrymme aefter þonce þegan wolde.
(163-169)

[that he denied his body pleasures and worldly joys, soft seats and days of feasting, also idle delights of the eyes, vainglorious dress. The fear of God was too much in his mind for him gladly to receive human glory.]

The saint's struggle is spiritual, and therefore he girds himself with "gaestlicum/waepnum" (177-178) [spiritual weapons]. Guthlac's fame is perpetuated in verse in the same way as the Widsith poet proclaims the glory of illustrious heroic warriors, but the Christian poet wishes to use Guthlac's courage as a spiritual example to his hearers. Thus he exclaims,

Forþon is nu arlic þaet we aefaestra
daede demen, secgen dryhtne lof
ealra þara bisena þe us bec fore
þurh his wundra geweorc wisdom cypað.
(526-529)

[Wherefore it is fitting now that we should celebrate the deeds of the righteous, render praise to God for all the examples by which the Scriptures reveal His wisdom unto us by His wondrous works.]

The Christian poem Andreas, based upon the courageous actions of the apostles, Matthew and Andrew, opens with a militant exuberance which one sooner expects in heroic verse. The tone of the introduction is so martial, in fact, that physical combat seems imminent.

Hwaet! We gefrunan on fyrndagum
twelfe under tunglum tireadige haeleð,
þeodnes þegnas. No hira þrym alaeg
campraedenne þonne cumbol hneotan,
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þaet waeron maere men ofer eorðan,
frome folctogan ond fyrdhwate,
rofe rincas, þonne rond ond hand
on herefelda helm ealgodon

THEORY OF THE EARTH

The theory of the earth is a branch of geology which deals with the origin and development of the earth and its various parts. It is a science which seeks to explain the causes and effects of the various geological phenomena which we observe in nature.

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THE EARTH AND ITS PARTS

The earth is a planet which is composed of various parts. These parts are the crust, the mantle, and the core. The crust is the outermost layer of the earth, and it is composed of various rocks and minerals. The mantle is the layer of the earth which lies below the crust, and it is composed of various rocks and minerals. The core is the innermost layer of the earth, and it is composed of various rocks and minerals.

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on meotudwange.

(8-11)

[Lo! we have heard in distant days of twelve glorious heroes, servants of the Lord, under the stars. Their majesty failed not in fight when banners clashed together....They were men renowned on earth, eager leaders and active in war, bold warriors, when on the field of battle, the place of war, shield and hand guarded the helmet.]

The hero-saints, however, take no defensive action against the enemy, heathen cannibals who are followers of the devil. Matthew, who is prepared to suffer martyrdom, does not oppose them when they bear arms against him. An angel, moreover, tells him "not to be over-fearful in soul" (98) because the enemy will be put in bondage and Paradise awaits him. "It is there," the angel says, that "[he] will be able to enjoy [his] desire for glory" (105-106).

Andrew, commissioned by God to cross the seas to rescue Matthew, miraculously makes the long journey in a scant three days aboard a ship piloted by the Lord. He is assured of victory, moreover; and although he is told, "Wes a domes georn" (959) [Ever be eager for glory], it is clear, once more, that this glory is the glory of the saints. There is no mortal combat involved here. As Andrew approaches the prison in which Matthew is bound, the seven heathen guards suddenly fall dead and the door breaks open at the Holy Spirit's touch. Furthermore, when the heathen cannibals are about to kill an innocent youth in order to satisfy their hunger, God intervenes and makes their weapons melt away like wax (1145-1148).

Andrew's glory results from his long-suffering patience and

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government has been unable to
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his obedience to God; there is never any physical warfare on his part. Unheroically, he allows himself to be tortured instead of fighting, for God has told him that although he will suffer pain, his body will heal again. Finally, Andrew's victory is the spiritual conquest of the heathen cannibals, and the fame and glory that ensues is fully accorded, by the apostle and converted foe alike, to the Lord of glory:

Is his miht ond his aeht ofer middangeard
 brene gebledsod, ond his blaed ofer eall
 in heofonprymme halgum scineð,
 wlitige on wuldre to widan ealdre,
 ece mid englum. þæt is æðele cyning!
(1718-1722)

[His might and His power are famously honoured throughout the world, and His glory gleams over all the saints in heavenly majesty, with beauty in heaven for ever and ever, eternally among the angels. That is a noble King!]

The point of view that is evident in the heroic warrior's concern for earthly fame and glory is in complete contrast to the outlook expressed in Judith; for although the pre-Christian heroine of this poem has been given heroic qualities and has won "illustrious fame in fight" (122-123), the attitude of the poet is distinctly Christian. Judith goes beyond the point of acknowledging God's aid in her victory, an acknowledgement which would be in keeping with the type of theism expressed by the heroes in The Iliad. Hector, for example, says that "Zeus...has consented to [his] great glory."⁵ Belief in divine support need not destroy the possibility for heroic achievement. Judith, however, prays for mercy (85) and salvation (90) before she takes up the sword to slay Holofernes, and she looks beyond

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It also provides a brief overview of the methodology used in the study. The second part of the paper presents the results of the study and discusses the implications of the findings. The third part of the paper concludes the study and provides some suggestions for future research.



Figure 1: A line graph showing the relationship between X and Y. The graph indicates a positive correlation between the two variables.

The results of the study show that there is a significant positive correlation between X and Y. This suggests that as X increases, Y also tends to increase. The findings of this study have important implications for the field of research. They provide valuable insights into the relationship between the two variables and can be used to inform future research and practice. The study also highlights the need for further research to explore the underlying mechanisms of this relationship. Overall, the study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between X and Y and provides a foundation for future research in this area.

mere earthly glory to heavenly reward:

Ealles ðaes Iudith saegde
 wuldor weroda dryhtne, þe hyre weor mynde geaf,
 maerðe on moldan rice, swylce eac mede on heofonum,
 sigorlean in swegles wuldre, þaes þe heo ahte soðne
geleafan
to ðam aelmihtigan; huru aet þam ende ne tweode
þaes leanes þe heo lange gyrnde.

(341-346)

[Judith ascribed the glory of all that to the Lord of hosts who endued her with honour, fame in the realm of the world and likewise reward in heaven, the meed of victory in the splendour of the sky, because she ever held true faith in the Almighty. At the end she doubted not at all of the reward which long while she had yearned for.]

In heroic poetry, men take pleasure in being able to out-shine other warriors, in their troop or in the enemy's, not only in heroic deeds, but also in the splendor of their war-trappings, especially if they are heirlooms acknowledged to be fashioned by the artful smith, Weland. Thus Hildegund, in Waldhere, encourages Walter by reminding him that "the work of Weland will fail not any of men, of those who can hold stout Mimring" (2-4). Fine armor is appreciated by warriors because byrnies and helmets are expensive and possessed only by the wealthy and by those who can deprive a prominent foe of his war-gear on the battlefield. That the winning of armor provides a strong incentive to fight is revealed in Waldhere when Walter challenges Gunther to try to take his corslet, the heirloom of AElfhre (II, 16-24), from him. Rich treasure and liberality in the dispensing of jewels, furthermore, helps to distinguish and exalt many illustrious warriors catalogued in Widsith. Treasure and splendid military dress, therefore, serve to set a hero

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apart from other men, something which runs markedly contrary to the ideas promulgated in the early Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry.

The heroic warrior's delight in treasure to enrich his personal glory is scorned by Simon and Thaddeus in The Fates of the Apostles as "laene" [transient] and "idle" [vain]. Guthlac, too, denies himself "worldly joys, soft seats and days of feasting, also idle delights of the eyes, vainglorious dress" (164-167). He wishes "to gain security from God" (257-258); he does not care for "worldly wealth, nor desire great possessions" (319-320). This absolute scorn for worldly pleasures and for the praise of men is vividly enunciated in the Alfredian version of Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae:

O, ye proud, why are ye desirous to sustain with your necks this deadly yoke? or why are ye in such vain labour, because ye would spread your fame over so many nations? Though it even happen that the farthest nations exalt your name, and praise you in many a language; and though any one with great nobleness add to his birth and prosper in all riches, and in all splendour, death nevertheless cares not for things of this sort, but he despises nobility, and devours the rich and the poor alike, and thus levels the rich and the poor! What are now the bones of the celebrated and the wise goldsmith, Weland? (69)

The things of this world are also seen to be transient in the elegaic poem, The Wanderer.⁶ The poet reflects,

Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice,
onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.
Her bið feoh laene, her bið freond laene,
her bið mon laene, her bið maeg laene,
eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorpeð!
(106-110)

[Everything is full of hardship in the kingdom of earth; the decree of fate changes the world under the heavens. Here possessions are transient, here friends are transient, here man is transient, here woman is transient; all this firm-set earth becomes empty.]

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the
theoretical framework in the study of the
relationship between the variables. The second part
presents the empirical results of the study. The third part
discusses the implications of the findings for the
theory and practice. The fourth part concludes the
paper and suggests directions for future research.

The results of the study show that there is a significant
positive relationship between the variables. This finding
is consistent with the theoretical expectations. The
implications of the findings are discussed in the
next section. The study has several limitations and
suggestions for future research are provided.

The study was conducted using a quantitative research
design. The data were collected from a sample of
participants. The results of the study are presented
in the following table. The table shows the mean
scores for each variable and the correlation coefficients.
The results indicate that there is a significant
positive relationship between the variables. This
finding is consistent with the theoretical expectations.
The implications of the findings are discussed in the
next section. The study has several limitations and
suggestions for future research are provided.

not view heroic action as vain. War has carried off the earls, but the lone warrior regards their violent death as "a glorious fate" (100).

It is with similar regret that the speaker in the elegaic poem, The Ruin, envisages the termination of "bright castle-dwellings" (21) and "many a mead hall full of the joys of men" (23). That he does not scorn material possessions is obvious from the tone which he establishes in the imaginative description of the former joy in the ruined city.

Hryre wong gecrong
 gebrocen to beorgum, þær iu beorn monig
 glaedmod ond goldbeorht gleoma gefraetwed,
 wlonc ond wingal wighyrstum scan;
 seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,
 on ead, on aeht, on eorcanstan,
 on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices.
(31-37)

[The place has sunk into ruin, levelled to the hills, where in times past many a man light of heart and bright with gold, adorned with splendours, proud and flushed with wine, shone in war trappings, gazed on treasure, on silver, on precious stones, on riches, on possessions, on costly gems, on this bright castle of the broad kingdom.]

It is "Fate the mighty" (24) that has allowed the devastation of the city. The speaker, like the exile in The Wanderer, realizes that things in this world are transitory. The attitude of both of the speakers is one of serious reflection, their conclusions like that of a man who

...þisne wealsteal wise gepohte
 ond þis deorce lif deope geondþenceð,
 frod in ferðe.
(The Wanderer, 88-90)

[has thought wisely of the foundation of things and who deeply ponders this dark life, wise in his heart.]

A comparison between heroic poetry and Old English Christian poetry reveals several fundamental differences. Both types of poetry have a common source in a poetic diction preserved from an oral tradition, with words and measures which describe heroes and courageous accomplishments, but whereas there is an open enthusiasm expressed by poets of the earlier poetry for physical combat, and especially for violent hand to hand combat with the sword between two famous warriors, the warfare in the Christian poetry most often involves either a spiritual battle for men's souls and victory over the devil, or the conquest of troops alien to God's people. The courage of Guthlac and Andrew, for instance, results from their stamina in resisting the power of the devil and in adhering to their faith in spite of persecution; both have no part in bloodshed.

Heroic poetry, on the other hand, reveals a distinct interest in leaders who are striving for individual recognition through the performance of exceptionally brave deeds. In Christian poetry, renown is also gained for those whose actions are daring and virtuous, but these accomplishments are for spiritual causes. The deeds, moreover, are celebrated to provide incentive for lesser men to emulate the faithful actions of the Christian hero. The important difference between the two kinds of poetry is that the point of view in heroic poetry is anthropocentric "in the sense," as Bowra points out, "that it celebrates men by showing of what high deeds they are capable."⁷ In Christian poetry, however, the courageous actions of its heroes serve to throw the glory of God into

greater relief and to provide spiritual examples for men engaged in their own spiritual struggles.

Although there are similarities in diction between the earlier heroic poetry and Christian verse, the difference in their respective attitudes towards the attainment of fame and glory is striking. The story of Beowulf, inextricably rooted in its pagan origin, reflects an essentially heroic outlook which may profitably be examined from three points of view: Beowulf's, Hrothgar's, and the narrator's.

CHAPTER II

BEOWULF'S HEROIC MOTIVATION

From the beginning of Beowulf to its conclusion, the poet reveals an interest in the actions of men, and especially in the heroic endeavors of its hero, Beowulf, who strives continually to win fame and glory on earth before death. This anthropocentric outlook, Bowra declares, is characteristic of heroic poetry:

What differentiates heroic poetry is largely its outlook. It works in conditions determined by special conceptions of manhood and honour. It cannot exist unless men believe that human beings are in themselves sufficient objects of interest and that their chief claim is the pursuit of honour through risk. Since these assumptions are not to be found in all countries at all times, heroic poetry does not flourish everywhere.¹

Christian poetry, on the other hand, minimizes the importance of men's accomplishments and directs the souls of men, rather, to seek heavenly glory. One is never allowed to be left with the feeling that "human beings are in themselves sufficient objects of interest"; instead, the actions of its heroes serve to illustrate God's power and to provide examples of proper spiritual aspiration. The songs of praise to God of the converted cannibals in Andreas, and the poet's thankfulness to the Almighty for providing spiritual examples like Guthlac are illustrative of the outlook set forth in the early Christian poetry.

Our attention is focused upon Beowulf as soon as he is introduced into the narrative, and he dominates our interest to the end of the poem. Beowulf has heard about Grendel's deeds at Heorot and

he is determined to seek Hrothgar, "since he had need of men" (201). Some critics, determined to make Beowulf into an allegorical symbol of Christ,² overlook any further motives in the hero's travelling to the Danes. But Beowulf's account to Hrothgar concerning his coming to Heorot reveals a strong suggestion of a desire to perpetuate his renown. At his first meeting with Hrothgar, he proudly declares,

ongunnen on geogope.	...haebbe ic maerða fela
on minre epeltyrf	Me wearð Grendles þing
° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °	undyrne cuð;
	and nu wið Grendel sceal,
wið þam aglaecan	ana gehegan
ðing wið þyrse. ³	

(408-426)

[I have in my youth undertaken many heroic deeds. The affair of Grendel was made known to me in my native land....And now alone I shall achieve the exploit against Grendel, the monster, the giant.]

His words, coming in such close proximity to his first greeting, would verge on boasting, if it were not for the matter of fact tone in which they are spoken. The word "alone," receiving a hard stress according to the alliteration, strikingly sets him apart from lesser warriors and establishes him as a hero.

Later in the evening, after the wine goblet has been proffered liberally, we can see even further into the hero's motivation in seeking out the Danes.

Ic þaet hogode, þa ic on holm gestah,
 saebat gesaet mid minra secga gedriht,
 þaet ic anunga eowra leoda
 willan geworhte, opðe on wael crunge
 feondgrapum faest. Ic gefremman sceal
 eorlic ellen, opðe endedaeg
 on þisse meoduhealle minne gebidan!

(632-638)

tells the leader of the Danes,

feorcyþðe beoð
selran gesohte þaem þe him selfa deah.
(1838-1839)

[For him who trusts his own merit it is better to visit distant lands.]

The import of this statement, I would suggest, is that heroic achievement in distant lands provides increased opportunity for perpetuating one's fame and glory among several peoples. A hero needs an arena in which to demonstrate his prowess, and if there is a prolonged period of peace in his own land, for instance, he must seek such an opportunity elsewhere. This is suggested by Tacitus, who writes,

Should it happen that the community where they are born be drugged with long years of peace and quiet, many of the high-born youth voluntarily seek those tribes which are at the time engaged in some war; for rest is unwelcome to the race, and they distinguish themselves more readily in the midst of uncertainties.⁴

That he should be actively engaged is characteristic of the hero.⁵ It is for this reason, for example, that Grettir, hearing about the plight of Thorstein and Steinvor from his home at Bjarg, is eager to journey to Sandhaugar, because intervening in their trouble will help to break the monotony.⁶ And it is also, in large part, for this reason that Beowulf leaves Geatland to come to Hrothgar's aid. "The affair of Grendel" has keenly interested him, and it affords a splendid opportunity to extend his fame. Bowra provides an explanation for the motivation which causes heroes to wish to become involved in others' problems:

Though the hero's first and most natural need is to display his

prowess and win the glory which he feels to be his right, he is ready to do so for some cause which does not immediately concern his personal interest but attracts him because it gives him a chance to show his worth.⁷

Beowulf, then, unlike Andrew who is summoned by God to act as His agent in rescuing Matthew⁸ and who does not anticipate personal fame, on his own volition travels to Heorot, to help Hrothgar, to be sure, but with the opportunity for further glory fixed clearly before his eyes.

Finally, there is a definite conflict in attitudes concerning the willingness of the Geatish leaders to endorse Beowulf's departure to journey to Hrothgar's support. According to the narrator's first comment about the venture, Beowulf is urged to bring aid to the Danes.

Ðone siðfaet him snotere ceorlas
lythwon logon, þeah he him leof waere;
hwetton hige(r)ofne, hael sceawedon.
(202-204)

[No whit did wise men blame him for the venture, though he was dear to them; they urged on the staunch-minded man, they watched the omens.]

Beowulf, too, verifies this account in his introductory speech to the Danish leader.

þa me þaet gelaerdon leode mine,
þa selestan snotere ceorlas,
þeoden Hroðgar, þaet ic þe sohte,
forþan hie maegenes craeft min[n]e cupon.
(415-418)

[Then my people counselled me, the best of men in their wisdom, that I should seek thee, Prince Hrothgar: because they knew the power of my strength.]

Later, however, when Beowulf returns to Geatland and is greeted by his kinsman Hygelac, a very different attitude is expressed by the

Geatish king.

Ic ðaes modceare
 sorhwylmum seað, siðe ne truwoðe
 leofes mannes; ic ðe lange baed,
 þaet ðu þone waelgâest wihte ne grette,
 lete Suð-Dene sylfe geweorðan
 guðe wið Grendel.

(1992-1997)

[In my heart's grief for that I was troubled with surgings of sorrow; I put no trust in my loved man's venture; long while I besought thee that thou shouldst have naught to do with the murderous monster, let the South-Danes themselves fight out the struggle with Grendel.]

That these conflicting attitudes should exist is significant because they serve to illuminate further Beowulf's essentially heroic character. In the case of the first two reports, it is possible that the poet wishes to show the hero's modesty; but what in fact the report does is to accentuate Beowulf's fame as a powerful fighter. He is not at all modest in the declarations of his renowned success in earlier conflicts against monsters, and this account all but obliterates his first statement of having been counselled by wise men to seek Hrothgar. Hygelac's pleading for Beowulf to let the Danes look after their own problems might indicate the poet's desire to exploit to the fullest extent the danger of the situation so as to magnify Beowulf's success; it might also be suggested that Hygelac, being not only king but also a kinsman of Beowulf, is overly concerned about his nephew; or it might spuriously be explained that Hygelac is not as wise as the counsellors who urge Beowulf to undertake the mission; but the reason we most strongly feel to be the true situation is that Beowulf, every inch a hero, is determined to demonstrate further his unique power. No one can dissuade him once

he has decided to achieve heroic deeds in a distant land, for the opportunity has been offered and he responds heroically to the call.⁹ Thus, although Beowulf is a savior, it is only in the sense that all heroes are redeemers.¹⁰ His total involvement with life, his egocentric drive, is in complete contrast to the aspirations of the hero-saint such as Guthlac or Andrew.¹¹

There is an aura about a hero which immediately sets him apart as an exceptional individual. Bowra declares that the power which heroes display in action can be felt in their mere presence. When they appear, other men know them for superior beings and wonder who they are.¹²

This phenomenon is reflected in heroic and Christian poetry alike, but there is a significant difference in the outlook of the respective poets towards what constitutes this heroic quality. In Andreas, for instance, the hero-saint is set apart from others not by his heroic bearing but by his extreme spirituality. The most striking circumstance in which an individual in this poem is distinguished by his exceptional appearance occurs on the journey to the land of the Mermedonians. The pilot of the ship reflects this quality, but, of course, He is God, not a mortal. In keeping with the tenor of Christian poetry, the outlook or emphasis is always directed to the deity; praise is accorded to God, not to the individual, for His beneficence in granting such splendid spiritual examples for weaker men.

In Beowulf, on the other hand, the poet reveals a genuine interest in the hero as an exceptional man. The hero reflects his unusual quality by his physical bearing; he commands every situation

and distinguishes himself by his splendid attire and equipage. Thus the watchman of the Scyldings, upon first sight of Beowulf, knows immediately that he is in the presence of a hero, and he says to the Geats,

Naefre ic maran geseah
 eorla ofer eorþan, ðonne is eower sum,
 secg on searwum; nis þæt seldguma,
 waepnum geweorðad, naefre him his wite leoge,
 ænlic ansyn.¹³

[I never saw in the world a greater earl than one of your band is, a hero in his harness. He is no mere retainer decked out with weapons, (never) does his face belie him, his excellent front.]

It is perfectly clear that the whole tone of this passage reveals the delight and awe of the coastguard for the spectacle of the great foreign leader with his retinue.

The entire trip from the coast up to Heorot is marked by an obvious celebration, based on sensuous appeal, of the noble entourage and the splendor of Heorot, gold-adorned and gleaming. Once again, the hero is recognized for his quality when the Geats are met by Wulfgar. Hrothgar's herald tells his lord,

Hy on wiggetawum wyrðe þinceað
 eorla geahtlan; huru se aldor deah,
 se þaem heaðorincum hider wisade.
 (368-370)

[They seem in their war gear worthy of respect from the noble-born. Of a truth the leader is valiant who guided the heroes hither.]

Beowulf, therefore, is recognized as an earthly hero; his bearing, his physical appearance, his complete command of the situation, all are in contrast to the spirit reflected in Andreas and Guthlac, for example. He has come in open glory to make known his power as a

slayer of flesh-eating monsters.

Beowulf's quest for fame is made manifest in his meeting with Hrothgar. He has a good conceit of himself and proudly describes a particularly courageous deed when he "ruined the race of the monsters" (421). Like the heroes in Waldhere, furthermore, he is concerned about his famous war-trappings; he asks that they be sent back to Hygelac if Grendel should be the victor. The armor "is a heritage from Hrethel, the work of Weland" (454-455). It is war-gear that has withstood blows in physical combat on many previous occasions; there is no inference whatsoever that "the sword of the spirit" or the "breastplate of righteousness" is symbolically involved here. In Guthlac, however, the Christian hero girds himself with "gaestlicum/waepnum" (177-178) [spiritual weapons]. Felix of Croyland's Life of St. Guthlac, the probable source of the Anglo-Saxon poem, makes explicit what these spiritual weapons consist of: "the shield of faith, the breastplate of hope, the helmet of chastity, the bow of patience...."¹⁴

That Beowulf is an earthly hero proud of his success in battle and of the fame which he has won is clearly evidenced in his quarrel with Unferth. The reason for Unferth's beginning the dispute is significant, for it is based on his jealousy of Beowulf's fame and glory. Hrothgar's orator would not allow

paet aenig oðer man
aefre maerða þon ma middangeardes
gehede under heofenum þonne he sylfa.
(503-505)

[that any other man in the world ever accomplished greater exploits

under heaven than he himself.]

It is natural that Beowulf should respond to Unferth's disparaging account of the exploit with Breca in order to clarify the situation; his reply, however, goes beyond the mere point of clarification. He says that he counts "it as a truth that [he] had greater might in the sea...than any other man" (532-534) and that the rush of battle killed the sea-monster by his hand (558).

It is obvious that Beowulf delights in relating his heroic activities and that he recognizes his own worth as a warrior. His success is granted to him by Fate:

Wyrð oft nere
unfaegne eorl, þonne his ellen deah!
(572-573)

[Fate often succours the doomed warrior when his valour is strong.] Though Christian interpreters insist that Wyrð here refers to the Christian God, one cannot help but feel that this power is the same arbiter who is ready to "award fame to whatever side seems good to Him" (686-687). That the attitude implied in this encomium is totally different from a truly Christian view is best realized when one examines the almost identical expression in its context in Andreas. At the point in the story in which the surging sea is threatening to capsize the ship in which Andrew is voyaging to rescue Matthew from the Mermedonian cannibals, the pilot, who is actually the Lord, stills the turbulent waves. Thereupon the poet says,

Forþon ic eow to soðe secgan wille,

þaet naefre forlaeteð lifgende god
 eorl on eorðan, gif his ellen deah.
 (458-460)

[Wherefore I will tell you in truth that the living God never forsakes a hero on the earth if his courage fail not.]

What is involved in Andreas is spiritual bravery, confidence in God's protection; what is involved in Beowulf, on the other hand, is physical strength and daring courage.

Nor is Beowulf content merely to relate a true account of what happened in the swimming competition with Breca, for he proceeds to scorn Unferth:

No ic wiht from þe
 swylcra searoniða secgan hyrde,
 billa brogan.
 (581-583)

[I have not heard such contests told of thee, (such) terror of swords.]

It is significant that Beowulf lays stress on not having heard of Unferth's performing great exploits, because it reveals his regard for gaining personal renown.

Immediately after Beowulf's taunting remark follows a rather ambiguous comment which I believe usually receives an incorrect interpretation. Beowulf continues his chastisement of Unferth because of the orator's bitterness to him, and he says,

Breca naefre git
 aet heaðolace, ne gehwaeper incer,
 swa deorlice daed gefremede
 fagum sweordum --no ic paes [fela] gylpe--,
 þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde,
 heafodmaegum.
 (583-588)

[Never yet did Breca or either of you two in the play of battle per-

form so bold a deed with gleaming blades--I do not boast of the struggle--though thou camest to be the murderer of thy brother, thy near kinsman.]

Now Klaeber takes this to mean that Beowulf enters the contest only to fulfil a boast¹⁵ and that he does not brag about the swimming match, but it is apparent that he does, in fact, take great pride in being the best of the three; his lengthy description of being hard-pressed in the stormy sea gives indication of this. He continues, moreover, to pour salt into the wound by unnecessarily bringing Unferth's past ignoble deed before the assembly. It is hardly in the Christian tradition, of the early Anglo-Saxon variety or any other, for Beowulf to exalt his own renown and to flaunt Unferth's infamy before the retainers, regardless of the provocation.

The Breca episode, in spite of Beowulf's according the match to a youthful incident, reveals an important attribute of the hero, his desire to prove and to make known his glory. This desire for personal glory, Chadwick says, is "often coupled with love of adventure for its own sake."¹⁶ Bowra, too, attributes our admiration for the hero to his courting danger for its own sake "to show of what stuff he is made."¹⁷ Thus Beowulf from the start, except for the slackness of his early years which is referred to later in the poem,¹⁸ has had regard for fulfilling his heroic nature by seeking fame and glory.

It is in Beowulf's fight against Grendel that the hero's striving to win glory for himself becomes more apparent. His reputation as a queller of monsters has been firmly established, for

Hrothgar has heard from seamen that he has "the strength of thirty men in the grip of his hand" (379-380); furthermore, the clarification of the events which surround the swimming contest with Breca and the resoluteness he has shown to accomplish heroic deeds against Grendel or to die, both serve to win the admiration and confidence of the Danes.

That Grendel is a devourer of flesh, and not a slayer of souls, cannot be overlooked in establishing Beowulf as a hero whose concern is here on earth and who gains the praise of people who are thankful that they can escape physical destruction. Throughout the poem, monsters are portrayed as real flesh-and-blood enemies of mankind, from those monsters Beowulf slays in his youth, to Grendel, those at the mere, Grendel's mother, and finally, the dragon. Grendel's association with Cain has been taken too readily by critics giving a wholly Christian interpretation of the poem to be proof of Beowulf's essential Christianity. But Wm. Whallon's explanation of this relationship is much more in keeping with the general tone of the poem. In his article, "The Idea of God in Beowulf," he states,

Even the Scriptural stories known to the poet, and the neologisms he borrowed from a monastery, lay within the bounds of a Germanic perspective. The Cain exemplum was combined with an ethic that already observed the importance of kinship, while the orcneas and gigantas among his progeny were associated with the indigenous eotens and elves, the gigantas þa wið gode wunnon (Beow. 113) possibly seeming familiar from a comparable myth known before....The man who kills his brother was related to the monsters of the moor, and this extraordinarily strong idea, without analogue in the Edda or the Bible, is as compatible with the one scheme of things as with the other. That the idea was of homiletic origin has been inferred from mention of the Cain offspring in later literature; this is not to say that Beowulf assigns Cain and Sigemund to different epochs of human history.¹⁹

The physical ravagings of Grendel completely overshadow any Scriptural or vaguely theological references which are used by the allegorical interpreters in their attempts to demonstrate his connection with Satan and the hell of the Bible. As a symbol of the devil, or even as a hellish foe who attacks men's souls, Grendel fares poorly in a comparison with the devils in Guthlac, for instance. In this poem, the devils are clearly Satan's disciples, and their blows are against Guthlac's soul.

Ne mostun hy Guðlaces gaeste sceþpan,
 ne þurh sarslege sawle gedaelan
 wið lichoman, ac hy ligesearwum
 ahofun hearmstafas, hleahtor alegdon,
 sorge seofedon, þa hi swiðra oferstag
 weard on wonge.

(226-231)

[They could not injure Guthlac's soul, nor by a hard blow part his soul from his body, but with cunning lies they raised up tribulations. They ceased from laughter; they grieved in sorrow when the stronger guardian vanquished them in the field.]

Guthlac's spiritual struggle and final victory, moreover, are hardly analogous to Beowulf's proud conquest of Grendel.

Similarly, Andrew's success against his foes, who, though they are physical enemies, are dehumanized in their close alliance with Satan's followers, is a spiritual victory which is assured from the beginning because of God's promise. The Lord tells Andrew,

Ic þe friðe healde
 þæt þe ne moton manganðlan,
 grame grynsmiðas, gaste gesceððan.
 (915-917)

[I will protect thee, so that foul foes, hostile evildoers, may do no harm to thy soul.]

How different is Beowulf's eagerness to engage in combat with

Grendel! His confidence that he will win further glory for himself is in total contrast to the passive endurance of Andrew and to the concept of eternal glory in heaven. God declares to His hero-saint, Andrew,

Hie þin feorh ne magon
 deaðe gedaelan, þeh ðu drype ðolie,
 synnigra slega. Ðu þaet sar aber;
 ne laet þe ahweorfan haeðenra þrym,
 grim gargewinn, þaet ðu gode swice,
 dryhtne þinum. Wes a domes georn.
 (954-959)

[They cannot give thy life over to death, though thou suffer a blow, the stroke of sinful men. Endure that pain; let not the power of heathen men, fierce strife of spears, turn thee aside to desert God, thy Lord. Ever be eager for glory.]

Although the cannibals are able to inflict physical pain upon Andrew and to strike blows that would ordinarily kill a man, Andrew's body is made whole after each onslaught. He endures the attacks of his tormentors without even considering offensive action, and his hope is for eternal glory.

Beowulf, however, is fighting against a monster who eats flesh and drinks men's blood, who exults in feasting, not on insubstantial souls but on whole bodies. Beowulf himself realizes this when he tells Hrothgar what Grendel will seek to do when he encounters him in battle:

Wen' ic þaet he wille, gif he wealdan mot,
 in þaem guðsele Geotena leode
 etan unforhte, swa he oft dyde,
 maegen Hreðmanna. Na þu minne þearft
 hafalan hydan, ac he me habban wile
 d[r]eore fahne, gif mec deað nimeð;
 byreð blodig wael, byrgean þence,
 eteð angenga unmunlice,
 mearcað morhopu; no ðu ymb mines ne þearft

lices feorðe leng sorgian.
(442-451)

[I think that he is minded, if he can bring it to pass, to devour fearlessly in the battle hall the people of the Geats, the flower of men, as he often has done. Not at all dost thou need to protect my head, but if death takes me he will have me drenched in blood; he will carry off the bloody corpse, will think to hide it; the lone-goer will feed without mourning, he will stain the moor refuges.]

That Beowulf's predictions concerning Grendel are correct is plainly illustrated when the creature greedily devours Hondscio:

...slat unwearnum,
bat banlocan, blod edrum dranc,
synsnaedum swealh; sona haefde
unlyfigendes eal gefeormod,
fet ond folma.²⁰

(741-745)

[He suddenly tore him asunder, devoured his body, drank the blood from his veins, swallowed him with large bites. Straightway he had consumed all the body, even the feet and hands.]

Grendel obviously is no slayer of souls, and certainly, if the intent of the poet had been to present allegorically or otherwise a spiritual enemy, the circumstance of the killing would have provided the best opportunity for at least a mention of the separation of the soul from the body. Instead, Grendel parts "lif wið lize" (733), a phrase which carries the import here of "life from limb."

Beowulf, however, is confident in his powerful handgrip against Grendel's might, and he is prepared to meet him on equal terms. There is some discrepancy in the two occasions in which mention of the terms of battle is made, for Beowulf first tells Hrothgar that since Grendel "in his madness cares naught for weapons," he scorns "to bear sword or broad shield, yellow targe to the battle" (433-438). When he speaks "some words of boasting" be-

fore he lies down on the bed, however, the story (this time more to the actual facts?) is changed:

No ic me an herewaesmun hnagran talige
 gupgeweorca, þonne Grendel hine;
 forþan ic hine sweorde swebban nelle,
 aldre beneotan, þeah ic eal maege;
 nat he þara goda, þaet he me ongean slea
 rand geheawe, þeah ðe he rof sie
 nipgeweorca; ac wit on niht sculon
 secge ofersittan, gif he gesecean deað
 wig ofer waepen.

(677-685)

[I do not count myself less in war strength, in battle deeds, than Grendel does himself; wherefore I will not slay him, spoil him of life by sword, although I might. He knows not of weapons so as to strike at me, hew my shield, though he may be mighty in works of malice; but we two shall do without swords in the night, if he dare to seek war without weapons.]

This second version seems to suggest that Beowulf sees greater glory to be gained in hand to hand combat than in sword play (and perhaps regards such a match as more chivalrous), for the spirit of his boast dominates the obvious inconsistencies. In the first place, he asserts that he is able to slay Grendel by a sword if he chooses to do so. His first report, however, conflicts with this statement; in addition, the narrator says that Beowulf's men cannot help him in the fight because

þone synscaðan
 aenig ofer eorþan irenna cyst,
 guðbilla nan gretan nolde.
 (801-804)

[No choicest of swords on the earth, no war spear, would pierce the evil monster.]

One cannot help but wonder, furthermore, why Grendel is incapable of wielding weapons when his mother is quite adept with her knife.²¹

Regardless of the inconsistent accounts, it is clear that the poet wishes to accentuate the gravity of the fight and the worth of his hero, for the emulation of Beowulf's strength and courage is in keeping with the tone of the whole poem.

The tone which is established in Beowulf's scorn to bear weapons against Grendel is completely different from that created in a similar situation in the Christian poem Guthlac. When God's foes,²² Satan's troops, rally together and threaten to bring a larger host against Guthlac, the hero, not caring for life, declares to them,

No ic eow sweord ongean
mid gebolgne hond oðberan þence,
worulde waepen, ne sceal þes wong gode
þurh blodgyte gebuen weorðan.

(302-305)

[I purpose not to bear a sword, a worldly weapon, against you with wrathful hand; nor shall this ground be taken for God by bloodshed.]

Guthlac's courage is great, but it is of a different order than Beowulf's; whereas the saint's whole hope is with God (318), Beowulf's trust is in his maegen,²³ and God is, at best, the silent partner who has power to grant or deny success. The narrator states,

Huru Geata leod georne truwoðe
modgan maegnes, metodes hylðo.

(669-670)

[Truly the prince of the Geats relied firmly on his fearless might, and the grace of the Lord.]

The attitude expressed is clearly different from that in Guthlac in which every victory is accorded fully to the Lord. On occasions in which God's aid is declared in Beowulf, however, it receives a

a completely different emphasis. When upon his return, Beowulf himself gives Hygelac a brief report of the fight against Grendel, there is no mention of divine assistance.

He mec þær on innan unsynnigne,
 dior daedfruma gedon wolde
 manigra sumne; hyt ne mihte swa,
 syððan ic on yrre uppriht astod.
 (2089-2092)

[He, the savage worker of deeds, purposed to put me into it (i.e. Grendel's glove), though guiltless, with many others; it could not come to pass thus when I stood upright in my wrath.]

Even though it might have taken more time for Beowulf to acknowledge God's part in the combat or to accord the glory to Him, his statement

To lang is to recenne, hu i(c ð)am leodsceaðan
 ylfa gehwylces onlean forgeald
 (2093-2094)

[It is too long to tell how I gave requital to the people's foe for every deed]

reveals that he is primarily proud of his personal accomplishment. The glory which he acknowledges, rather, is that which he has gained for the Geats by his heroic deeds.

þær ic, þeoden min, þine leode
 weorðode weorcum.
 (2095-2096)

[There, my prince, did I bring honour to thy people by my deeds.]

Fame is granted to Beowulf, the poet tells us (819) and the hero rejoices in "ellenmaerþum" (828) [heroic deeds]. The entire mood is one of celebration as the Danes marvel at the claw of Grendel, the token of glory whose later loss causes them so much grief. The emphasis clearly is upon Beowulf's exceptional achievement and upon

the fame which results for the hero.

Ðaer waes Beowulfes
 maerðo maened; monig oft gecwaeð,
 þaette suð ne norð be saem tweonum
 ofer eormengrund ofer naenig
 under swegles begong selra naere
 rond haebbendra, rinces wyrðra.
 (856-861)

[There Beowulf's fame was proclaimed. Oftentimes many a one said that neither south nor north between the seas, over the wide earth, under the vault of the sky, was there any better among warriors, more worthy of a kingdom.]

An occasion more opportune for a song of praise to God than at this point would be difficult to discover. Instead, the panegyric is directed to the personal glory of Beowulf, and the hero is compared not to one of the saints or to another suitably Christian hero, but to the pagan Sigemund, famed as a slayer of dragons.

Sigemunde gesprong
 aefter deaðdaege dom unlytel,
 syððan wiges heard wýrm acwealde,
 hordes hyrde.
 (884-887)

[There sprang up for Sigemund after his death no little fame when the man bold in battle killed the dragon, the guardian of the treasure.]

That the bard should associate Beowulf's victory over Grendel with Sigemund's slaying of the dragon is significant for its late implications in the hero's encounter with the dragon that ravages Geatland, and it will be dealt with later; but it has present significance in that it vividly demonstrates how heroes are personally remembered for their courageous deeds. The killing of monsters puts a hero on a different level from that of heroes who fight only against human foes, as Bowra suggests, "because their powers are largely

unknown."²⁴ The added glory which Beowulf has gained for himself has already begun to be praised by the scop, and his fame, as the Sigemund lay seems to support, will be perpetuated in similar fashion. For Sigemund, the poet goes on to relate,

...waes wreccena wide maerost
ofer werpeode, wigendra hleo,
ellendaedum.

(898-900)

[was by far the most famous of adventurers among men, protector of warriors by mighty deeds.]

Beowulf's heroic accomplishment is rewarded with treasure, and he is proud of his gifts, unlike Guthlac, for instance, who scorns worldly wealth. The bestowing of treasure, the telling of tales, and revelry dominate the entire section which describes the celebration of Beowulf's victory over Grendel, and Hrothgar's brief words of thankfulness to God are soon lost amid the material splendor of gold jewelry and ornamented drinking vessels. As each gift is presented, one can readily see new lustre added to Beowulf's glory. Wealtheow's words, just preceding the brief description of the group's retiring for the evening, reflect the essentially anthropocentric attitude of the poem.

Hafast þu gefered, þaet ðe feor ond neah
ealne wideferhþ weras ehtigað,
efne swa side swa sae bebugeð,
windgeard, weallas.

(1221-1224)

[Thou hast brought it about that far and near men ever praise thee, even as far as the sea hems in the home of the winds, the headlands.]

Beowulf's attitude towards his next fight, the struggle against Grendel's mother, is in perfect harmony with the heroic

outlook which characterizes his first battle against Grendel. It is still the same confident hero who admonishes the grieving leader of the Scyldings.

Ne sorga, snotor guma! Selre bið aeghwaem,
 þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne.
 Ure aeghwylc sceal ende gebidan
 worulde lifes, wyrce se þe mote
 domes aer deape; þæt bið drihtguman
 unlifgendum aefter selest.

(1384-1389)

[Sorrow not, wise warrior. It is better for each to avenge his friend than greatly to mourn. Each of us must needs await the end of life in the world; let him who can achieve fame ere death. That is best for a noble warrior when life is over.]

It is this outlook that prevails throughout the poem, contrary as it is to any Christian perspective. Our view is directed primarily, if not totally, towards the heroic accomplishment of Beowulf in his attempts to "achieve fame ere death."

The heroic stance of Beowulf is contrasted with Unferth's lack of response to the challenge and to the opportunity for winning glory which seeking out Grendel's mother affords. The son of Ecglaf, unlike Beowulf, does not fulfil the boasts that he makes when mead has bolstered his courage. Unferth, the poet says,

selfa ne dorste
 under yða gewin aldre geneþan,
 drihtscype dreogan; þær he dome forleas,
 ellenmaerðum. Ne waes þaem oðrum swa,
 sy þan he hine to gu e gegyred haefde.

(1468-1472)

[He himself durst not risk his life beneath the tossing of the waves, accomplish heroic deeds. There he forfeited fame, repute for might. Not so was it with the other when he had clad himself for war.]

Unferth's refusal to meet the challenge is to his discredit; Beowulf's

action, on the other hand, is lauded. Beowulf does not forfeit fame nor reputation for might, and this receives the poet's praise.

The hero's attitude is still the Germanic outlook with which he viewed Grendel's wrongful attacks, and it would seem to run contrary to Rogers' claim that the second fight represents a deterioration in Beowulf's motives for fighting Grendel's mother. Rogers charges that in this fight

Beowulf is more of a Germanic hero and less of a Christian knight. He speaks now of revenge and glory, not of God's judgment. This time Hrothgar has offered him gold as a reward for success, and Beowulf accepts the loan of Hrunding.²⁵

This argument is faulty, furthermore, because although "Grendel's mother is not so clearly the foe of God, and she does not attack without provocation,"²⁶ as Rogers observes, she is a loathsome creature who is hostile to man. It is true that the poet does seem to extend some sympathy to her when he says, "wolde hire bearn wrecan,/angan eaferan" (1546-1547) [She was minded to avenge her child, her only son], but his pity is quickly withdrawn and completely obscured in the subsequent description of Beowulf's peril. Grendel's mother is a monster, the mother of God's foe, and surely that is sufficient reason for the slaying of Aeschere and the removal of Grendel's claw to be avenged. Hrothgar's offer of much reward, furthermore, does not receive comment by Beowulf; instead, he speaks of winning fame for himself in the same fashion in which he promises Hrothgar that he will "accomplish deeds of heroic might, or endure [his] last day in the mead hall" (636-638). Now against Grendel's mother he makes a similar declaration: "Each of us must

needs await the end of life in the world; let him who can achieve fame ere death" (1386-1388).

Beowulf's acceptance of Hrunting should not be taken as an indictment against him, nor as contributing to his difficulties in the fight.²⁷ It would be unchivalrous for him not to accept Unferth's offer. Secondly, the sword receives the wholehearted commendation of the narrator, and the tone that he establishes in his description of the famous blade would seem to preclude any possible discredit to Beowulf for accepting its use. The poet says,

waes þaem hæftmece Hrunting nama;
 þaet waes an foran ealdgestreona;
 ecg waes iren, atertanum fah,
 ahyrded heaþoswate; naefre hit aet hilde ne swac
 manna aengum þara þe hit mid mundum bewand
 se ðe gryresiðas gegan dorste,
 folcstede fara; naes þaet forma sið,
 þaet hit ellenweorc aefnan sceolde.

(1457-1464)

[That hilted sword was called Hrunting; it was an excellent old treasure; the brand was iron, marked with poisonous twigs, hardened in the blood of battle. It never failed any men in war who seized it with their hands, who ventured to go on dire journeys, to the meeting-place of foes.]

Beowulf has used swords against sea-monsters previously,²⁸ and the precautions which he takes by wearing armor in this fight, unlike his previous disregard for wearing helmet and corslet against Grendel, serve him well in preventing the she-wolf's knife from piercing him.²⁹

That Hrunting fails can better be attributed to one of two things; first, that the poet, not wishing to make this fight a mere repetition of the earlier struggle, emphasizes the extreme difficulty of the match in order to make the achievement appear more glorious;

secondly, to indicate that it is not fated that Hrunting should maintain its repute; for swords, like heroes, are granted or denied success in war. The sword, the poet relates,

...geswac
 ðeodne aet pearfe; ðolode aer fela
 hondgemota, helm oft gescaer,
 faeges fyrdhraegl; ða waes forma sið
 deorum madme, þaet his dom alaeg.
 (1524-1528)

[failed the prince in his need. It had endured in times past many battles, often had cut through the helmet, the mail of a doomed man. That was the first time for the costly treasure that its repute failed.]

Beowulf, furthermore, does not blame the sword for failing him in his attempts to win glory, but he tells Hrothgar that the weapon is worthy and to Unferth he says that he "...þonne guðwine godne tealde" (1810) [counted him (i.e. Hrunting) a good friend in battle].

When Hrunting does fail, however, Beowulf does not despair, but trusts in his strength. "Thus a man must needs do," the poet says, "when he is minded to gain lasting praise in war nor cares for his life" (1534-1536). Ever minded to achieve glory, Beowulf struggles with Grendel's mother and is stabbed by her knife. His corslet, however, "Wið ord ond wið ecge ingang forstod" (1549) [opposed the entrance of point and edge]. Once again, God's help in this difficulty is relegated to a position of secondary importance. The narrator declares,

Haefde ða forsiðod sunu Ecgþeowes
 under gynne grund, Geata cempa,
 nemne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede,
 herenet hearde, -- ond halig God
 gewoeld wigsigor.
 (1550-1554)

[Then the son of Ecgtheow, the hero of the Geats, would have found death under the wide waters, if the war corslet, the stout battle net, had not afforded him help, and if holy God had not achieved victory in war.]

God's help appears to be very vague when the poet relates that

rodera Raedend hit on ryht gesced
yðelice, syððan he eft astod.
(1555-1557)

[the Ruler of the heavens brought about a right issue with ease,
when once more he stood up.]

It is not at all made certain that God has helped Beowulf to get to his feet again, and if the help is merely in allowing Beowulf to see the "ealdsweord eotenisc" (1558) [old sword of giants] hanging on the wall of the cave, it seems very slight indeed. At the exact time of the struggle, the narrator does not mention that God has revealed the sword to the hero in his need; it is only during Beowulf's report to Hrothgar that it is mentioned.³⁰ As a result, our attention is focused directly on Beowulf's action, not upon any divine assistance.

In contrast, God's help is perfectly explicit in the Christian poetry. When Guthlac is in dire trouble, attacked by the fiends from hell, there is no ambiguity about God's part in the victory. God's messenger, the saint Bartholomew, easily defeats the enemy and rescues Guthlac's spirit from their foul grip.

Haefde Guðlases	gaest in gewealdum
modig mundbora,	meahtum spedig,
þeostra þegnas	þreaniedlum bond,
nyd onsette.	

(694-697)

[The dauntless guardian, rich in his powers, had Guthlac's spirit in his keeping; he fettered the servants of darkness with afflictions,

laid distress upon them.]

The saint is sent by God to declare His orders to the troops from hell; they are not to injure Guthlac's body, but to heal his pains.

In Andreas, too, it is God's power that is emphasized, not man's worth. Andrew is always the Lord's agent, whereas Beowulf is His partner. The pilot and crew who accomplish the long voyage to the Mermedonian land in only three days are the Lord and His angels; it is God who suddenly puts to death the seven heathen guards who stand before the prison in which Matthew is held; and it is God who heals Andrew and who causes the miraculous deluge that covers the earth. Throughout the poem it is made clear that all glory must be ascribed to God and not to man.

A parallel is suggested between the strange melting of the huge sword that Beowulf uses against Grendel's mother and the melting of the enemies' swords in Andreas. But again the outlook of the two poets is completely different, for in Beowulf it is clear that it is the poisonous blood of the monster that has caused the blade to melt³¹; in Andreas, however, God intervenes and saves the guiltless youth by causing the swords of the cannibals to melt and to be rendered ineffectual.

Het waepen wera wexe gelicost
on þam orlege eall formeltan,
þy laes scyldhatan sceððan mihton,
egle ondsacan, ecga þryðum.
(1145-1148)

[He bade the weapons of the men melt all away in the battle like wax, so that the wicked persecutors, the horrible foes, could do no hurt by the strength of swords.]

Beowulf is jubilant about his victory and takes pleasure in his booty, the ornamented hilt and Grendel's head. The hero regards them as "tires to tacne" (1654) [tokens of glory]. The praise of the narrator, furthermore, reflects genuine admiration for Beowulf's heroic deed:

Ða com in gān ealdor ðegna,
 daedcene mon dom gewurþad,
 haele hildeor Hroðgar gretan.
 (1644-1646)

[Then the prince of the thanes, the man bold in deeds, made glorious with fame, the hero terrible in battle, came in to greet Hrothgar.]

A concern for personal fame and glory clearly dominates Beowulf's report to Hrothgar, even though he makes two passing references to God's protection and aid. Beowulf says that "aetrihte waes/guð getwaefed, nymðe mec God scylde" (1657-1658) [the fight was all but ended, if God had not protected me]; secondly, he declares that the "ylda Waldend" (1661) [Ruler of men] allowed him to see the old sword on the wall (1662-1663). This acknowledgement, however, is obscured by the praise which he receives from Hrothgar, and at best, it does not amount to more than saying, "Fate was on my side." This is borne out in Beowulf's report of the battle to Hygelac, when he describes his victory.

holm heolfre weoll, ond ic heafde becearf
 in ðam [guð]sele Grendeles modor
 eacnum ecgum; unsofte þonan
 feorh oðferede; naes ic faege þa gyt.
 (2138-2141)

[The water welled with blood, and in that hall in the depths I cut off the head of Grendel's mother with a gigantic sword; with violence I tore her life from her; I was not yet doomed to death.]

Beowulf's response indicates that he is confident in his ability to defeat any foe if fate is on his side. He has always maintained that Fate often helps the "unfaegne eorl" (573) [undoomed warrior] if his valor is good, and he recognizes that he has not been doomed to die in this battle. Similarly, in his account to Hygelac, he says,

paer waes Hondscio hild onsaege,
feorhbealu faegum.

(2076-2077)

[There was war fatal to Hondscio, a violent death to the doomed man.]

It is precisely this spirit of bravado which permeates Beowulf that is so dissimilar to the lack of personal glorification in Andreas, for example. When Matthew is attacked by the Mermedonian cannibals, he readily submits to endure whatever affliction God has ordained for him (72-75). Sorrowfully, he addresses God:

A ic symles waes
on wega gehwam willan þines
georn on mode; nu ðurh geohða sceal
daede fremman swa þa dumban neat.
(64-67)

[Ever at all times have I been eager in mind to follow Thy will in every way; now through tribulations I must suffer like the dumb cattle.]

His submission is lauded by the Christian poet where it would receive only Beowulf's scorn. Thus when Hrothgar resigns himself to another period of renewed strife after Aeschere has been slain, Beowulf rouses him to action by saying, "It is better for each to avenge his friend than greatly to mourn" (1384-1385). The Beowulf poet indicates his admiration for heroic action when he relates that Unferth "forfeited fame, repute for might" (1470-1471). Then he

adds approvingly,

ne waes þaem oðrum swa,
syðþan he hine to guðe gegyred haefde.
(1471-1472)

[Not so was it with the other when he had clad himself for war.]

Beowulf returns in triumph to his homeland and shows himself to be not only a great hero but also a loyal retainer. The poet then passes quickly over his career, praising him for his exemplary life, and stating that in time he became king. The narrator's next statement immediately warns of a reversal of fortune against Beowulf, for it is strikingly reminiscent of the manner in which he has characterized Hrothgar's rule:

he geheold tela
fiftig wintra waes ða frod cyning,
eald eþelweard....
(2208-2210)

[He ruled well for fifty years--he was then an aged king, an old guardian of the land.]

This parallels Hrothgar's reign, for in his parting words to Beowulf, the leader of the Danes had told him, "Swa ic Hring-Dena hund missera/weold under wolcnum" (1769-1770) [Thus I ruled over the Ring-Danes under the heavens for fifty years]. He had gone on to say that

edwenden cwom,
gyrn aefter gomene, seopðan Grendel wearð,
ealdgewinna, ingenga min.
(1774-1776)

[a reverse came upon me in my land, sorrow after joy, when Grendel grew to be a foe of many years, my visitant.]

The pattern of a rise and later decline is thus established, and

this sense of imminent disaster is reinforced by the double reference to Beowulf's age; for Hrothgar's affliction beset him when he became old, his age and grey hair being alluded to numerous times throughout the poem.³²

The narrator has prepared us, therefore, for trouble, and it is swift in coming. Beowulf rules well, until that time that

...an ongan
deorcum nihtum draca rics[i]an,
se ðe on hea(um) h(aeþ)e hord beweotode,
stanbeorh steapne.

(2210-2213)

[a dragon which guarded treasure in a burial mound, a steep rock, began to show his might on the dark nights.]

The dragon has been provoked by some man who takes a flagon from the hoard, and to this extent, his wrath is understandable. But H. L. Rogers' conclusion,

Grendel was God's foe; the Dragon is not....The Dragon's rage is not unjust, for he was provoked by theft from the hoard,

fails to take several important facts into account. In the first place, dragons, provoked or not, are hardly to be viewed as beneficent creatures or as sharing the same morality as men; they are usually associated with evil,³³ and it must be remembered that Grendel's glove is devised "deofles craeftum ond dracan fellum" (2088) [by the power of the devil and with dragon skins].

The dragon's wrath and the devastation which it inflicts, moreover, far exceed the provocation.

Waes se fruma egeslic
leodum on lande, swa hyt lungre wearð
on hyra sincgifan sare geendod.

Da se gaest ongan gledum spiwan,
 beorht hofu baernan,-- bryneleoma stod
 eldum on andan; no þaer aht cwices
 lað lyftfloga laefan wolde.
 Waes þaes wyrmes wig wide gesyne,
 nearofages nið nean on feorran,
 hatode ond hynde.

 Haefde ligdraca leoda faesten,
 ealond utan, eorðweard ðone
 gledum forgrunden.

(2309-2335)

[The first onslaught was terrifying to the people in the land, even as it was speedily ended with sorrow for their giver of treasure. Then the monster began to belch forth flames, to burn the bright dwellings. The flare of the fire brought fear upon men. The loathly air-flier wished not to leave aught living there. The warring of the dragon was widely seen, the onslaught of the cruel foe far and near, how the enemy of the people of the Geats wrought despite and devastation....The fire-dragon had destroyed with flames the stronghold of his subjects, the land by the sea from without, the countryside.]

We do not expect Beowulf to consider the attack as just payment for the rifling of the hoard, since he receives the flagon (2405-2406) and does not seem to regard fighting for the treasure to be wrong.³⁴ Furthermore, the encounter with the dragon affords another opportunity for him to demonstrate his capabilities as a slayer of monsters and as a protector of men. That there is treasure in the offing and fame to be won by killing the dragon recall the wealth and renown gained by Sigemund, whom the scop terms "...waes wreccena wide maerost/ ofer werþeode" (898-899) [was by far the most famous of adventurers among men].

Thus it is perfectly in keeping with Beowulf's heroic nature that he vows vengeance, for he has been successful in every past exploit. Uttering words of boasting, the hero says,

Ic geneðde fela
 guða on geogoðe; gyt ic wylle,
 frod folces weard faehðe secan,
 maerðu fremman, gif mec se mansceaða
 of eorðsele ut geseceð.

(2511-2515)

[In my youth I passed through many battles; yet I, aged protector of the people, wish to seek the fight, to achieve the heroic deed, if the foul foe comes out of his cave to face me.]

The charge made against Unferth, that "he himself durst not risk his life beneath the tossing of the waves, accomplish heroic deeds"

(1468-1470), will not be able to be levied against Beowulf. Beowulf does not "forfeit fame, repute for might" (1470-1471). "Great catastrophes are occasions for heroes to make their greatest efforts and perform their finest feats,"³⁵ Bowra asserts, and Beowulf is prepared to meet his greatest foe, the dragon.

The daring deeds by which a hero gains fame are performed alone; thus Beowulf fights Grendel unaided (424-426), he goes against Grendel's mother alone (1376-1377), he achieves fame in the battle against the Frisians because of his solitary deeds (2359-2362), and now alone he seeks combat with the dragon. Beowulf, still the confident hero that he was in his youth, is mindful to "accomplish heroic deeds" (2535), and he tells his retainers,

Nis þæt eower sið,
 ne gemet mannes, nefn(e) min anes,
 þæt he wið aglaecan eofoðo dæle,
 eorlscype efne. Ic mid elne sceall
 gold gegangan, cððe guð nimeð,
 feorhbealu frecne frean eowerne!

(2532-2537)

[This is not your venture, nor is it in any man's power, except mine alone, to strive with his strength against the monster, to perform heroic deeds. With my might I shall gain the gold; or war, a per-

ilous death, shall carry off your prince.]

His heroic boast is uttered in the same spirit in which he had previously declared, "I shall achieve fame for myself with Hrunting, or death will carry me off" (1490-1491).

Beowulf's vow to seek the dragon alone receives the narrator's admiration and praise:

strengo getruwode
anes mannes; ne bið swylc earges sið!
(2540-2541)

[He trusted in the strength of a single man. Such is no coward's venture.]

Similarly, Sigemund's great fame is gained by his slaying the dragon and winning the ring-hoard unaided:

he under harne stan,
aepelinges bearn ana geneðde
frecne daede, ne waes him Fitela mid.
(887-889)

[Under the grey stone he ventured alone, the son of a chieftain, on the daring deed; Fitela was not with him.]

The attitude of the narrator clearly implies that the greatest fame to be won is through singular achievement; it is personal glory that heroes seek and for which they are prepared to risk their lives.

Beowulf is determined to fight the dragon alone, even though his counsellors have pleaded with him

paet he ne grette goldweard þone,
lete hyne licgean, þaer he longe waes,
wicum wunian oð woruldende.
(3081-3083)

[not to approach the guardian of the gold but to let him lie there, where long he had been; bide in his dwelling till the end of the world.]

But Wiglaf's criticism of his leader cannot be taken as proof of

Beowulf's being "spiritually unguarded because of his pride," as Goldsmith argues,³⁶ for it is the same heroic pride that causes him not to heed Hygelac's plea to let the Danes settle their own affairs (1992-1997) and which urges him to win personal glory. "The code by which [a hero] lives is a code of honor which is not a universal requirement like law," W. H. Auden declares, "but an individual one, that which I require of myself...."³⁷ Because Wiglaf is not of the same heroic mettle as Beowulf, he cannot fully realize why Beowulf must engage in this combat; that not to do so would run counter to his personal ethos.

Although Beowulf is troubled by "þeostrum geþoncum" (2332) [dark thoughts], unlike Andrew, who submits without resistance to his oppressors, he courageously pledges to seek out the dragon and he promises that he will not

...beorges weard
oferfleon fotes trem, ac unc [furður] sceal
weorðan aet wealle, swa unc wyrd geteoð,
Metod manna gehwaes.

(2524-2527)

[give back the space of a foot before the keeper of the barrow, but the fight shall be between us at the wall, as Fate, the master of every man, shall decide for us.]

The attitude which is reflected in his statement that Fate will grant fame to the victor of his choice carries the same import as Beowulf's earlier comment before the Grendel fight, that "wise God, the holy Lord, shall award fame to whatever side seems good to Him" (685-687). Fate arbitrarily grants or withholds success in battle.

It is fate and not punishment for the sin of superbia that is

responsible for Beowulf's days to have come to an end. The narrator makes this explicit in his statement,

ða waes eall sceacen
dogorgerimes.
(2727-2728)

[Then all his length of days was passed away.]

Monsters, too, are under fate's decree, for Grendel's days are similarly numbered:

wiste þe geornor
þæt his aldres waes ende gegongen,
dogera daegrim.
(821-823)

[He knew but too well the end of his life was come, the full count of his days.]

Thus Beowulf's sword, too, is not destined to help him against the dragon (2682-2683), and the hero receives a mortal wound.³⁸

Beowulf's satisfaction with the life he has lived, particularly since he has probed his mind before the encounter to determine whether he has broken "ealde riht" (2330) [established law], indicates that he does not regard his motivations in fighting for the treasure hoard to be blameworthy. It is not with any suggestion of regret that he tells Wiglaf,

Ic ðaes leode heold
fiftig wintra; naes se folccynning,
ymbsettendra aenig ðara,
þe mec guðwinum gretan dorste,
egesam ðeôn. Ic on earde bad
maelgesceafta, heold min tela,
ne sohte searoniðas, ne me swor fela
aða on unriht. Ic ðaes ealles maeg
feorhbennum seoc gefean habban;
forðam me witan ne ðearf Waldend fira
morðorbealo maga, þonne min sceaceð

lif of lice.

(2732-2743)

[I have ruled this people for fifty years. There was no people's king among the nations who durst come against me with swords, or oppress me with dread. I have lived the appointed span in my land, guarded well my portion, contrived no crafty attacks, nor sworn many oaths unjustly. Stricken with mortal wounds, I can rejoice in all this; wherefore the Ruler of men has no cause to blame me for the slaughter of kinsmen, when my life passes out from my body.]

In every way Beowulf has been an exemplary leader according to the Germanic code.

The attitude revealed in Guthlac's last words as he surveys his life, however, is completely different from the last reminiscences of the heroic warrior, Beowulf. Guthlac reveals to his servant a miracle which occurred to him previously and which he has never revealed to anyone.

þy laes þæt wundredan weras ond idesa,
ond on geaþ gutan, gieddum maenden
bi me lifgendum.

(1232-1234)

[lest men and women should have marvelled at it and told it forth in mockery, spread it in songs, while I was alive.]

Beowulf's wondrous vanquishing of Grendel, however, is proclaimed in his honor. The narrator says, "Ðaer waes Beowulfes/maerðo maened" (856-857) [There Beowulf's fame was proclaimed], and he describes how the scop spontaneously makes a story of Beowulf's exploit:

secg eft ongan
sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian,
ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
wordum wrixlan.

(871-874)

[The man began again wisely to frame Beowulf's exploit and skill-

fully to make deft measures, to deal in words.]

It is through song that a hero's reputation is established and perpetuated, and therefore Beowulf's retainers ride about his burial mound, exalting his heroic deeds. The narrator, moreover, approves of their action, and he says,

swa hit gede(fe) bið,
 þaet mon his winedryhten wordum herge.
 (3174-3175)

[Thus it is fitting that a man should extol his friendly lord in words.]

That Guthlac's satisfaction is totally unlike a heroic warrior's pride in his behavior is readily evidenced when the saint declares to his attendant,

Huru, ic nolde sylf
 þurh gielpcwide gaestes mines
 frofre gelettan, ne faeder mines
 aefre geaefnan, aebylg godes.
 (1234-1237)

[Verily, I myself in my life was never minded by boastful speech to harm my soul's well-being, nor ever to draw down the wrath of God my Father.]

Beowulf is concerned about the regard of men, that nothing will mar his earthly fame and glory; Guthlac, however, is positively opposed to boastful speech, for his glory lies solely in God. Beowulf is content to die because he has "achieved fame ere death"; whereas Guthlac, longing to leave this world, is eager for his soul to speed "on ecne geard,...on sellan gesetu" (1267-1269) [to its everlasting home,...to the better abode].

Far from regretting his engagement in battle with the dragon in order to win the jewel-hoard, Beowulf requests Wiglaf

to bring the treasure to him so that he might gaze upon it before he dies. He tells his loyal retainer,

paet ic ðy seft maege
 aefter maððumwelan min alaetan
 lif ond leodscipe, þone ic longe heold.
 (2749-2751)

[that after winning the great store of jewels, I may the more easily leave life and land, which long I have guarded.]

Beowulf is thankful to the King of glory, moreover, because he has been able to gain material wealth for his people and that he can sell his old life for the treasure hoard (2794-2801). He is obviously satisfied with the exchange, and he anticipates the fame which will be his as a result; it is the glory to be enjoyed through the esteem of men who have a high regard for heroic action, not the glory in sending one's soul after death "to Faeder faepum" (188) [in the Father's embrace], as the narrator had exclaimed earlier in a pious outburst.

Beowulf is content to die heroically, and he shows no anxiety about the state in which he has left the Geats. "Beowulf's dying speeches, in which prescience might be expected," Sisam writes, "show no anxiety about the future of his people."³⁹ His last request makes it clear that he expects to be remembered as a hero, not as a haughty king whose actions have effected a national catastrophe. He tells Wiglaf,

Hatað heaðomaere hlaew gewyrcean
 beorhtne aefter baele aet brimes nosan;
 se scel to gemyndum minum leodum
 heah hlifian on Hronesnaesse,
 þaet hit saeliðend syððan hatan

Beowulfes biorh, ða ðe brentingas
ofer floda genipu feorran drifa\.
(2902-2808)

[Bid the men famed in battle raise at the sea headland a gleaming mound after the burning. It shall tower high on Hronesness, a reminder to my people, so that seafarers may afterwards call it Beowulf's barrow when from afar the ships drive over the dark sea.]

Beowulf's desire is to be remembered by men; it is this, not the well-being of his soul, that has motivated his entire career; glory on earth, not glory in heaven, has been his constant desire. His retainers fulfil his last wish, and they fashion a pyre

helm[um] behongen, hildebordum,
deorhtum byrnum, swa he bena waes.
(3139-3140)

[hung round with helmets, battle targes, bright corslets, as he had craved.]

Beowulf's last request for an elaborate memorial, and for the lasting praise of men, is in keeping with the aspirations of heroic warriors. Thus Agamemnon's soul tells Achilles to be joyful because the Achaeans had built a pyre and

built up a great and glorious mound, on a foreland jutting out over the broad waters of the Hellespont, so that it might be seen far out at sea by the sailors of today and future ages.⁴⁰

Similarly, in Beowulf, the Geats prepare a burial mound as a memorial to their lord:

Geworhton ða Wedra leode
hl(aew) on [h]liðe, se waes heah ond brad,
(wae)gliðendum wide g(e)syne,
ond betimbredon on tyn dagum
beadurofes becn.

(3156-3160)

[Then the people of the Weders wrought a mound, which was lofty and broad, at the edge of the headland, visible far and wide to seafarers; and in ten days they finished the beacon of the man

mighty in battle.]

Guthlac, on the other hand, dies only in the presence of his attendant, and his last wish is that his sister be told that he will see her "on sweglwuldre" (1187) [in the glory of heaven] and that he be buried on the lonely mountain, his body "lame beluce" (1194) [closed round with clay]. The hero-saint wants obscurity in this life and takes no delight in human glory (167-169) so that he might have greater glory in heaven; the hero, however, desires to be known for his deeds on earth in order that he might enjoy fame and glory by being remembered by later generations. The words and deeds of the Christian hero are brought to God's notice, not to men's. Thus in Guthlac, Bartholomew, God's messenger, declares that he will bring the words and deeds of the hero to God's attention:

sceall ic his word ond his weorc in gewitnesse
dryhtne laedon. He his daede conn.
(720-721)

[I shall bring his words and his work to the knowledge of God;
He shall know of his deeds.]

The deeds of the hero-saint are exalted by God, and it is this fact that he cherishes (771-772).

The hero Beowulf, however, must secure his fame by meeting the challenge presented by the dragon who is ravaging his land and from whom treasure is to be gained. Heroes must answer the call to adventure or lose their fame by having to rely upon outside assistance. "Refusal of the summons," Campbell declares, "converts the adventure into its negative...and the subject...be-

comes a victim to be saved."⁴¹ Thus Hrothgar, who must rely upon Beowulf for support, is not an heroic figure in his later life; because he cannot save his people, he, himself, becomes a "victim to be saved." Thus the Christian heroes in Guthlac, Andreas, and The Fates of the Apostles, in spite of their spiritually courageous deeds, are essentially unheroic in the sense that they do not exert their own egos; instead, they endeavor to extinguish their own wills by becoming selfless, even to the extent of offering their lives in martyrdom. It is clear, however, when one keeps in mind Beowulf's motivations to achieve fame and glory, that he is no savior, selflessly giving up his life for his people.

Beowulf's death, regarded by the narrator as a victory,⁴² and far from being any punishment for pride, is the only fit end for an heroic character. "At last comes the obstacle which cannot be surmounted, the fight which is too much even for the greatest and strongest hero," Bowra states, and when the hero falls, "...his life is completed and rounded off, as it can hardly be if he lives to safe old age."⁴³ Thus Hrothgar, although he receives the approval of his people or the narrator,⁴⁴ is not a hero, because he does not risk his life against Grendel and lives to an inglorious old age. Beowulf, however, does risk his life, and though he dies, his death is transcended in glory. Our admiration for Beowulf because of his glorious death is aptly described by Bowra, writing about heroes in general:

[The hero] is honoured because he has made a final effort in courage and endurance, and no more can be asked of him. He gives dignity to the human race by showing of what feats it is capable; he extends the bounds of experience for others and enhances their appreciation of life by the example of his abundant vitality. However much ordinary men feel themselves to fall short of such an ideal, they none the less respect it because it opens up possibilities of adventure and excitement and glory which appeal even to the most modest and most humble. The admiration for great doings lies deep in the human heart, and comforts and cheers even when it does not stir to emulation. Heroes are the champions of man's ambition to pass beyond the oppressive limits of human frailty to a fuller and more vivid life, to win as far as possible a self-sufficient manhood, which refuses to admit that anything is too difficult for it, and is content even in failure, provided that it has made every effort of which it is capable.⁴⁵

Beowulf's death, therefore, rounds off his heroic life. One needs only to visualize Beowulf seeking outside assistance, like Hrothgar against Grendel, to see how incompatible this would be with the pride and confidence he has consistently demonstrated. Pride is part of the hero's character; thus to charge Beowulf with the Christian sin of superbia is to fail to comprehend the nature of heroism.

The spirit of Beowulf aligns fully with heroic poetry in that it celebrates the achievements of exceptional human beings. In poems written from a Christian point of view, however, all glory is centered in heaven. Men's souls are of primary importance, not the praise of men. Thus Guthlac's soul is borne by the angel's "to þam longan gefean" (1307) [to lasting joy], and songs of triumph are sung by troops of angels, not to the personal glory of Guthlac, but to the "heahþrym godes" (1324) [great glory of God]. In Andreas, too, praise is sung not to

the saint's honor, but to God whose "...blaed ofer eall/in
heofonþrymme halgum scineð" (1719-1720) [glory gleams over
all the saints in heavenly majesty].

Beowulf, however, closes with a final celebration of
its hero. The hero's retainers, not angels in heaven, speak
"ymb w(er)" (3172) [of the man] and they exalt his heroic
deeds:

eahtodan eorlscipe ond his ellenweorc
duguðum demdon.

(3173-3174)

[They exalted his heroic life and praised his valorous deed
with all their strength.]

Fame and glory, the chief motivating factors of a
hero, must take precedence over attempts to establish Beowulf
as an ideal king;⁴⁶ and since these goals are opposed to the
attitudes expressed in the early Christian poetry, it is incon-
gruous to attempt to adopt a hero whose outlook is, in fact,
contrary to them. The final judgement of Beowulf's band of
retainers will not be obscured in efforts to divert attention
from the poem's essential paganism:

cwaedon þaet he waere wyruldcyning[a]
manna mildust ond mon(ðw)aerust,
leodum liðost ond lofgeornost.

(3180-3182)

[They said that among the kings of the world he was the mildest
of men and most kindly, most gentle to his people and most
eager for praise.]

CHAPTER III

HROTHGAR'S FADING GLORY

Too often in their attempts to establish the essential Christianity of Beowulf, critics have centered their arguments upon Hrothgar's "sermon" or upon his other pietistic outbursts and have either deliberately ignored or failed to take into account evidence which conflicts with their line of development. For in spite of the considerable number of occasions in which Hrothgar voices thanks to God and his long speech on pride which gives indication of homiletic influence, the leader of the Scyldings remains a product of the heroic society, which holds fame and glory for heroic achievement in high regard.

Hrothgar rises to power in the same manner as his illustrious progenitor Scyld Scefing, who had brought it about that "each of his neighbours over the whale road must needs obey him and render tribute" (9-11). Hrothgar, too, establishes his fame as a powerful king:

þa waes Hroðgare heresped gyfen,
wiges weorðmynd, þaet him his winemagas
georne hyrdon, oðð þaet seo geogoð geweax,
magodriht micel.

(64-67)

[Then good fortune in war was granted to Hrothgar, glory in battle, so that his kinsmen gladly obeyed him, until the younger warriors grew to be a mighty band.]

Hrothgar is a leader who has gained personal glory through warfare; he is called "guðrof" (608) [famed in battle] and "widcup"

(1042) [far-famed] because he "was minded to practise sword-play" (1040-1042). The motivation for his pursuit of war is fully in the Germanic tradition described by Tacitus:

There is great rivalry...among the chieftains as to who shall have the largest and keenest retinue. This means rank and strength, to be surrounded always with a large band of chosen youths--glory in peace, in war protection: nor is it only so with his own people, but with neighbouring states also it means name and fame for a man that his retinue be conspicuous for number and character....¹

That Heorot is built as a testimony to Hrothgar's success, as a symbol of glory, is revealed in the narrator's statement,

Him on mod bearn,
 þæt healreced hatan wolde
 medoaern micel men gewyrcean
 þon[n]e ylðo bearn aefre gefrunon.
 (67-70)

[It came into his mind that he would order men to make a hall building, a mighty mead dwelling, greater than ever the children of men had heard of.]

Heorot is "the foremost of buildings under the heavens for men of the earth" (309-310); its light shines over many lands (311). Hrothgar's achievement is considerable, and he consistently receives the narrator's approval as a worthy ruler who does not break his pledge, but bestows treasure to his comitatus (80-81).

Grendel's attacks come suddenly upon Heorot, and he is motivated by jealousy in hearing the revelry of the Danish retainers. Grendel is a malicious demon, a creature of the marshes, and this is sufficient reason for his attacking the men in the mead hall. His continual onslaughts, moreover, are

regarded as a personal feud with the Danes:

heteni\as waeg,
fyrene ond faehðe fela missera,
singale saece.
(152-154)

[Many years he bore bitter hatred, violence, and malice, an unflagging feud.]

Hrothgar cannot re-establish peace, and he is called an "aepeling aergod" (130) [literally, "ere-good prince"], not because of some moral fault, but because his prosperous and happy rule has been disrupted. It might be, as he tells Beowulf later, that he did not think that he had any foe "under the stretch of the sky" (1772-1773), and that his security has betrayed him, but at this point it is not at all made clear that Grendel, in the biblical sense, is an agent sent by God to punish Hrothgar for pride. Evidence is rather to the contrary, for Hrothgar receives the narrator's sympathy from the outset of the attacks:

waes þaet gewin to strang,
la^z ond longsum!
(133-134)

[That struggle was too hard, too hateful, and lasting.]

The narrator later states, moreover, that the Danes are accustomed to being prepared for any sudden attack:

Waes þeaw hyra,
þaet hie oft waeron an wig gearwe,
ge aet ham ge on herge, ge gehwaeper þara
efne swylce maela, swylce hira mandryhtne
þearf gesaelde.
(1246-1250)

[It was their custom that often both at home and in the field they should be ready for war, and equally in both positions at all such times as distress came upon their lord.]

The malicious foe's feuding with the Danish people far outweighs the arguments of those who would establish Grendel as an agent sent by God to punish Hrothgar for superbia. Grendel is a supernatural force against which he, like most men, is helpless. Hrothgar does not need to fear attacks from human foes, for like Scyld "who wrested the mead benches from troops of foes" (4-5) so that each of his neighbors had to obey him and pay tribute (9-11), Hrothgar had enjoyed good fortune in war (64). The poet's unqualified approval accorded to Scyld, moreover, is similarly given to Hrothgar: "ac þaet waes god cyning" (11, 863) [for that was a good king]. And the narrator makes the same commendation, in fact, of the whole Danish retinue: "waes seo þeod tilu" (1250) [Those people were good].

Any criticism of Hrothgar should be made according to the Germanic terms of the poem, in spite of his self-chastisement for believing that he had no one to fear. It is fate that is responsible for Hrothgar's plight. He himself says,

hie wyrd forsweop
on Grendles gryre.
(477-478)

[Fate has swept them away to the dread Grendel.]

In addition, when he is warning Beowulf against pride, out of a morality which is not the sole property of Christianity, we are not so much struck by his guilt of excessive pride as by the drastic change in his fortune. Hrothgar declares,

Hwaet, me þaes on eple edwenden cwom,

gyrn aefter gomene, seopðan Grendel wearð,
ealdgewinna, ingenga min.

(1774-1776)

[Lo! a reverse came upon me in my land, sorrow after joy, when Grendel grew to be a foe of many years, my visitant.]

The reversal of fortune, part of the Anglo-Saxon belief in the transience of life and the pessimism inherent in the concept of Wyrd, is of the exact same kind as that which changes Scyld Scefing's first condition of "feasceaft" (7) [misfortune] to prosperity.

Scyld "received solace for that; he grew up under the heavens, lived in high honour..." (7-8). Similarly, Beowulf, who is first considered to be "sleac" (2187) [sluggish], experiences edwenden:

Edwenden cwom
tiredigum menn torna gehwylces.
(2188-2189)

[A recompense came to the famous man for every slight.]

Thus we must accept the narrator's final judgement of the Danish king, not Hrothgar's comments which are not in keeping with the morality and outlook of the poem.

paet waes an cynning
aeghwaes orleahtra, op paet hine ylðo benam
maegenes wynnum, se þe oft manegum scod.
(1885-1887)

[That was a king blameless in all ways, till old age, which has done hurt to many, robbed him of the joys of strength.]

Hrothgar thus attempts to end Grendel's feud with the Danes in the same manner in which he settled Ecgtheow's feud with the Wulfings: he offers treasures. When this fails, the Danes hold council, vow sacrifices in their temples, or petition the "slayer of souls" (177) to aid them in their distress. Their actions are

seen as following naturally from their usual practice, for the narrator declares,

Swylc waes þeaw hyra,
haepenra hyht; helle gemundon
in modsefan.

(178-180)

[Such was their wont, the hope of the heathen. Their thoughts turned to hell.]

It is not in keeping with the attitude expressed in the poem that the narrator should comment,

ne hie huru heofena Helm herian ne cupon,
wuldres Waldend,

(182-183)

[Nor in truth could they praise the Protector of the heavens, the Ruler of glory],

for Hrothgar often gives thanks to God. It is not at all convincing to argue that their heathenish practices are the result of a lapse in faith, since from the start of their woes they do not seek aid from the Christian God; they look, rather, for an end to their misery. That Hrothgar turns to the pagan All-Ruler for a change in fortune is evident again after Grendel's mother attacks Heorot. The narrator states that at dawn, Beowulf goes

þær se snotera bad,
hwæþer him Alwalda aefre wille
aefter weaspelle wyrpe gefremman.

(1313-1315)

[to where the wise man was waiting to see whether the All-Ruler would ever bring to pass a change after the time of woe.]

The narrator's unhesitating rebuke of the heathen is better attributed to the poet's conflict in interests and to a failure in the creative handling of his subject.

If we must cast blame on Hrothgar, it should rest upon his inability to accomplish his task as "helm Scyldingas" [Protector of the Scyldings].² Even this criticism, however, is difficult to uphold, for it is more in keeping with the general outlook of the poem to accept the narrator's favorable judgement and to recognize that heroes like Beowulf belong to a different order of men. Hrothgar does not risk his life against Grendel; indeed, there is no indication that he has ever volunteered; but although this saves him from the charges of pride that are levied by many critics against Beowulf, he is lesser in our eyes than the hero of the poem. When Hrothgar ceases to assume the role of the people's protector, he himself becomes a victim to be saved, for he chooses safety rather than to risk losing his life. The hero's personal code, however, becomes the determining principle in his life, and although he believes that he is operating under condition of free will, there are really only two possibilities for him if he is to maintain his heroic position--glory in victory, or death in the attempt. Hrothgar's decision to look for a savior may make him the morally better man in a poem which is essentially Christian in its outlook, but it puts him on a lower scale in the pagan Beowulf.

Hrothgar, in fact, has a high regard for fame and glory; that he is a victim and not a hero is due to chance and to his own present failure to endeavor to accomplish heroic deeds. Thus he must get help from a better warrior and offer treasure as a reward. Entrusting Beowulf with the care of Heorot, he admonishes,

gemyne maerþo, maegenellen cyð,
 waca wið wrapum Ne bið þe wilna gad,
 gif þu þaet ellenweorc aldre gedigest.
 (659-661)

[Be mindful of fame, show a mighty courage, watch against foes. Nor shalt thou lack what thou desirest, if with thy life thou comest out from that heroic task.]

Hrothgar realizes that personal fame is won through courageous deeds; he approves, and promises rewards.

When Beowulf is successful in defeating Grendel and in gaining the monster's claw as a token of victory, Hrothgar expresses his gratefulness to God, who ever can "perform wonder after wonder" (930-931). If one does not force a Christian interpretation, his statement is not incongruous, for Wm. Whallon's assertion about the concept of God in the poem should be taken into consideration in maintaining Beowulf's essential paganism:

For the words faeder, alwalda, and metod are as biblical as pater, omnipotens, and fatum are in the Aeneid, and Beowulf is to this extent neither Christian or unchristian but pre-Christian.³

Thus it is not incongruous for Hrothgar to acknowledge Beowulf's personal glory immediately after he has thanked the Almighty. He tells Beowulf,

 þu þe self hafast
 daedum gefremed, þaet þin [dom] lyfað
 awa to aldre.

(953-955)

[Thou hast brought it to pass for thyself by deeds that thy glory shall live for ever.]

It is significant, too, that the feast which is held to celebrate Grendel's defeat should end with the exclamation of Hrothgar's wife in praise of Beowulf:

Hafast þu gefered, þæt ðe feor ond neah
 ealne wideferhþ weras ehtigað,
 efne swa side swa sae bebugeð,
 windgeard, weallas.

(1221-1224)

[Thou hast brought it about that far and near men ever praise thee,
 even as far as the sea hems in the home of the winds, the headlands.]

Directed to Beowulf's personal glorification, Wealtheow's words by
 far overshadow those addressed by her husband in praise of God's
 power.

When Grendel's mother kills Aeschere, Beowulf comforts
 Hrothgar and declares,

Selre bið aeghwaem,
 þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne.
 Ure aeghwylc sceal ende gebidan
 worolde lifes, wyrce se þe mote
 domes aer deape; þæt bið drihtguman
 unlifgendum aefter selest.

(1384-1389)

[It is better for each to avenge his friend than greatly to mourn.
 Each of us must needs await the end of life in the world; let him
 who can achieve fame ere death. That is best for a noble warrior
 when life is over.]

Upon hearing these words, Hrothgar thanks God for what Beowulf has
 said (1396-1397). It is clear, therefore, that he approves of
 Beowulf's motivation, the desire to "achieve fame ere death," which
 has prompted the hero's declaration to effect revenge. After
 Grendel's mother has been killed and Grendel's head is brought to
 Heorot, Hrothgar acknowledges that Beowulf was "born excellent"
 (1703), and he again lauds Beowulf's fame:

Blaed is araered
 geond widewegas, wine min Beowulf,
 ðin ofer þeoda gehwylce.

(1703-1705)

[Thy renown is raised up throughout the wide ways, my friend Beowulf, among all peoples.]

Although Hrothgar is more prone than Beowulf to thank God for an end to misery, he still fully appreciates the personal glory that can be won through the performance of heroic deeds. That Providence has this power to grant fame or to allow fate to destroy a doomed man, moreover, is evident in Hrothgar's long advisory speech to Beowulf:

Wundor is to secganne,
hu mihtig God manna cynne
þurh sidne sefan snyttru bryttað,
eard ond eorlscipe; he ah ealra geweald.
(1724-1727)

[It is wonderful to tell how mighty God with His generous thought bestows on mankind wisdom, land, and rank. He has dominion over all things.]

Speaking "from the wisdom of many years" (1724), Hrothgar warns Beowulf against the pride in believing that he can make himself invulnerable to a reverse in his present good fortune, and he cites various afflictions which can effect such a change--sword, fire, flood, spear, old age, death (1763-1768). His tirade against pride, however, is primarily aimed at the ruler who neglects the destiny which God formerly gave him, "his share of honours" (1752), at kings like Heremod. Nothing in the poem indicates that Beowulf succumbs to pride; on the contrary, evidence shows that Beowulf rules well.⁴

It is true, as Dorothy Whitelock asserts in The Audience of Beowulf, that the "poet makes Hrothgar use the metaphor of spiritual armour against the devil's arrows in his warning speech to Beowulf on the dangers of pride" (81); and I would also grant that "the man

who wrote Hrothgar's 'sermon' was conversant with the teachings of Augustine and Gregory, and was familiar with Gregory's favorite image of the soldier keeping vigil against the onslaughts of the Enemy."⁵ The arrows of the devil are mentioned, furthermore, in the Christian poem Guthlac, and Andreas makes reference to the "devil's dart" (1189); but in these two Christian poems, this metaphor is perfectly appropriate. Guthlac has armed himself with spiritual weapons, and the foes from hell bring "many temptations against [his] spirit" (188-189). When the devil appears before the band of cannibals to rouse them to attack Andrew, the apostle rebukes his efforts and declares,

Hwaet, ðu deofles strael,
 icest þine yrmðo. De se aelmihtiga
 heanne gehnaegde, ond on heolstor besceaf,
 þær þe cyninga cining clamme belegde,
 ond þe syððan a Satan nemdon,
 ða ðe dryhtnes a deman cuðon.
(1189-1194)

[Lo! thou devil's dart, thou increasest thy misery; the Almighty humbled thee hapless, and thrust thee into darkness where the King of kings covered thee with a fetter, and ever after they have named thee Satan, they who knew how to glorify the law of the Lord.]

Hrothgar's warning is more similar to the conclusions of the solitary exile in The Wanderer that nothing remains permanent in the world. The wanderer does not despair when he considers the nature of our existence, but his attitude towards the changing state of things is clearly pessimistic. Accepting the harshness of the transience of the world with stark realism, he reflects,

Forþon ic gepencan ne maeg geond þas woruld
 for hwam modsefa min ne gesweorce,

þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence,
 hu hi faerlice flet ofgeafon,
 modge maguþegnas. Swa þes middangeard
 ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleþ,
 forþon ne maeg weorþan wis wer, aer he age
 wintra dæl in woruldrice.

(58-65)

[And thus I cannot think why in this world my mind becomes not over-cast when I consider all the life of earls, how of a sudden they have given up hall, courageous retainers. So this world each day passes and falls; for a man cannot become wise till he has his share of years in the world.]

The metaphor of the devil's arrows in Beowulf is not in keeping with its pagan outlook. Hrothgar's warning against pride is not in itself unGermanic, for the solitary man in The Wanderer offers similar advice:

Wita sceal gepyldig,
 ne sceal no to hatheort ne to hraedwyrde,
 ne to wac wiga ne to wanhydig,
 ne to forht ne to faegen, ne to feohgifre
 ne naefre gielpes to georn, aer he geare cunne.

(65-69)

[A wise man must be patient, not over-passionate, nor over-hasty of speech, nor over-weak or rash in war, nor over-fearful, nor over-glad, nor over-covetous, never over-eager to boast ere he has full knowledge.]

The advice Hrothgar gives to Beowulf is appropriate in the Germanic society which stresses the importance of liberality in gift-giving. His statement that pride grows when "the guardian slumbers, the keeper of the soul" (1741-1742), however, is incongruous with that part of the poem in which it occurs and with Beowulf as a whole, for the only reference made by the Danes about concern for souls is about the "slayer of souls" whom they petition to "succour them for the people's distress" (176-178). The poet, I would suggest, has

been misled for the moment by his piety and has failed to see that his idea of Christian pride is incompatible with both heroic pride and the Germanic outlook towards fate.

It is obvious by Hrothgar's praise of Beowulf's heroic deeds and by his own earlier career that the Danish leader holds fame and glory in high regard. Experience has taught him that "lif is laene," the inherent pessimism which is common to pagan and Christian Anglo-Saxon poetry alike, but he remains pagan in that he continues to value treasure, valorous accomplishments, and reputation among men. He does not risk his life to perform heroic deeds, and thus he, too, like Unferth, merits the narrator's judgement:

paer he dome forleas,
ellenmaerdum.

(1470-1471)

[There he forfeited fame, repute for might.]

Hrothgar might be a good king, but Beowulf is a hero, and that means much more to us, to the narrator, and to the heroic world of which he is a part.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC ATTITUDE OF THE NARRATOR

From the enthusiastic introduction of Beowulf to its dignified conclusion, the narrator reveals his admiration for exceptional human beings whose heroic endeavors have won them personal fame and glory. In telling his story, the narrator almost totally maintains the objectivity which Bowra cites as one of the chief characteristics of heroic poetry. Heroic poetry, Bowra asserts,

is essentially narrative and is nearly always remarkable for its objective character. It creates its own world of the imagination in which men act on easily understood principles, and, though it celebrates great doings because of their greatness, it does so not overtly by praise but indirectly making them speak for themselves and appeal to us in their own right. It wins interest and admiration for its heroes by showing what they are and what they do. This degree of independence and objectivity is due to the pleasure which most men take in a well-told tale and their dislike of having it spoiled by moralising or instruction.¹

It is my contention that the Beowulf poet has their heroic outlook, which is objective and anthropocentric, unlike the prevailing attitude which dominates early English Christian poetry. The subjectivity of the narrator in Beowulf is seldom obtrusive, and it usually consists of statements showing the poet's approval or disapproval of a particular action, a judgement with which we readily concur. At times, however, the subjectivity lapses into direct moralizing which intrudes upon the narrative in a manner that is both artistically wrong and not in keeping with the general outlook of the poem. It is the concern of this chapter to show that the

narrator's consistently positive attitude towards fame and glory indicates Beowulf's essential paganism and that when his subjective moralizing is overtly Christian, it is the result of the poet's momentary failure to control his subject matter.

From the very beginning of Beowulf, the narrator expresses his interest in men who are remembered for their heroic accomplishments.

HWAET, WE GAR-DEna in geardagum,
 peodcyniga prym gefrunon;
 hu ʼa aepelingas ellen fremedon!
 (1-3)

[Lo! we have heard the glory of the kings of the Spear-Danes in days gone by, how the chieftains wrought mighty deeds.]

It is the personal glory of kings of an ancient race that he considers to be an object of sufficient interest to his audience. His anthropocentric view immediately contrasts with Andreas, for example, which opens in similar fashion to Beowulf, but is Christian in its outlook:

Hwaet! We gefrunan on fyrndagum
 twelfe under tunglum tireadige haeleð,
 peodnes pegnas. No hira prym alaeg
 campraedenne þonne cumbol hneotan.
 (1-4)

[Lo! we have heard in distant days of twelve glorious heroes, servants of the Lord, under the stars. Their (glory) failed not in fight when banners clashed together.]

The poet's interest, however, is in "servants of the Lord" who do God's bidding; their actions are important not because they win personal glory but because they make manifest God's power. Similarly, the avowed purpose of Guthlac is to reveal how angels "pro-

tect the lives of holy men" (90) and to lead men to strive for heavenly perfection. Guthlac, the poet declares, "became an example there to many in Britain, when, bold in fight, the blessed warrior went up the mountain" (174-176).

The cursory account of the Danish genealogy significantly focuses upon the fame and glory which each king acquires during his lifetime. Scyld Scefing is a good king, the narrator relates, because he "wrested the mead benches from troops of foes, from many tribes; he made fear fall upon the earls....He grew up under the heavens, lived in high honour, until each of his neighbours over the whale road must needs obey him and render tribute" (4-11). There is nothing to indicate that the narrator disapproves of the means by which Scyld gains honor in the world by forcing men to acknowledge him as their leader; in fact, it seems to elicit his praise. Scyld's illustrious burial is marked by the riches of the treasure which his people lay in the ship, and the narrator is clearly impressed by the spectacle of the wealth:

þær waes madma fela
 of feorwegum fraetwa gelaeded;
 ne hyrde ic cymlicor ceol gegyrwan
 hildewaepnum ond heaðowaedum,
 billum ond byrnum.

(36-40)

[Many treasures and ornaments were there, brought from afar. I never heard of a sightlier ship adorned with weapons of war and garments of battle, swords and corslets.]

Scyld has gained personal glory through his heroic deeds; his fame is firmly established by the elaborate burial which he had requested (29). Our first reaction to the narrator's statement that Scyld "passed

hence into the Lord's protection" (26-27) is to mark this as a Christian concept; however, the ship burial with its magnificent treasure is pagan, and the account terminates with the additional comment that "men cannot tell for a truth...who received that burden" (50-51). Christian poetry, on the other hand, does not leave such questions open. Even in Exodus, whose hero Moses is pre-Christian, the poet speaks of "recompense in heaven after death for the evils of life for all the righteous" (4-7).

Scyld's son, also, establishes himself as a mighty king:

Beowulf waes brene --blaed wide sprang--
 Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in.
(18-19)

The tone implies that the narrator considers his achievement to be worthy and admirable, for he goes on to tell how "a man shall prosper by glorious deeds" (24-25). By dispensing treasure which he has inherited from his father, a young king will gain retainers who will stand by him when he is old (20-24). Reputation is desirable, therefore, and one achieves it by glorious deeds--military conquest and liberality in gift-giving.

Hrothgar, too, wins "glory in battle" (65) which gains the obedience of his kinsmen, and he is generous in his dispensing of rings. The narrator's positive attitude towards the Danish people is evident in his praise of their glory and in his sympathy for their sudden affliction by Grendel's attacks. The evil monster initiates the feud, and the poet makes it clear that he has "pitted himself against right" (144). The poet objectively relates how the Danes

do everything they can to settle the feud, but Grendel will not "lay aside murderous death" (156). "Many a mighty one sat often in council," he states, and "they held debate what was best for bold-minded men to do against sudden terrors" (171-174). The "mighty ones" and "bold-minded men" vow sacrifices and petition the "slayer of souls" (177) with prayers. It is completely incongruous, therefore, that the positive, approving tone should change suddenly to one that is vituperative and condemnatory when the poet subjectively casts his judgement upon their usual practices (178). It is outrightly contradictory that he should say,

helle gemundon
in modsefan, Metod hie ne cupon,
daeda Demend, ne wiston hie Drihten God,
ne hie huru heofena Helm herian ne cupon,
wuldres Waldend,

(179-183)

[Their thoughts turned to hell; they knew not the Lord, the Judge of deeds; they wist not the Lord God; nor in truth could they praise the Protector of the heavens, the Ruler of glory],

for Hrothgar often praises the Ruler of men.² The contradiction, I would suggest, is the result of the poet's attempt to impose his Christianity upon a pre-Christian people; whereas he is usually content to credit them with a theistic belief and to marvel "that mighty God has ever ruled over mankind" (701-702), his subjectivity gives way to overt moralizing that is obtrusive and incongruous with the pagan outlook of the poem. The objectivity is displaced by a didacticism that one sooner expects in Guthlac or Andreas, when the narrator exclaims,

Wa bið þaem ðe sceal
 purh sliðne nið sawle bescufan
 in fyres faepm, frofre ne wenan,
 wihte gewendan! Wel bið þaem þe mot
 aefter deaðdaege Drihten secean
 ond to Faeder faepmum freoðo wilnian!
 (183-188)

[Woe is it for him who must needs send forth his soul in dread affliction into the embrace of the fire, hope for no solace, suffer no change! Well is it for him who may after the day of death seek the Lord, and crave shelter in the Father's embrace!]

The Beowulf poet, however, usually maintains his objectivity, and his interest is primarily in heroism. It is with obvious delight that he describes the splendid war-trappings of Beowulf's entourage as the warriors wind their way up to Heorot.

Eoforlic scionon
 ofer hleorber[g]an gehroden golde,
 fah ond fyrheard,-- ferhwearde heold
 gupmod grimmon.
 (303-306)

[The boar images shone over the cheek armour, decked with gold; gay with colour and hardened by fire they gave protection to the brave men.]

He focuses attention upon Beowulf as a hero who is set apart from other men by his heroic bearing. The coastguard, Wulfgar, and Hrothgar recognize that he is an exceptional man, and the narrator's description reveals his admiration for the person of Beowulf.

Beowulf maðelode --On him byrne scan,
 searonet seowed smipes orþancum--.
 (405-406)

[Beowulf spoke--on him his corslet shone, the shirt of mail sewn by the act of the smith.]

That the narrator respects heroic qualities is everywhere evident in Beowulf's speech and action. When he subjectively comments on

Beowulf's success in defeating Grendel, it is the hero who shares the glory of the victory on an equal basis with God:

Ac him Dryhten forgeaf
 wigspeda gewiofu, Wedera leodum,
 frofor ond fultum, þæt hie feond heora
 ðurh anes craeft ealle ofercomon,
 self mihtum. Soð is gecyþed,
 þæt mihtig God manna cynnes
 weold wideferh.

(696-702)

[But the Lord gave them success in war, support and succour to the men of the Weders, so that through the strength of one, his own might, they all overcame their foe. The truth has been made known, that mighty God has ever ruled over mankind.]

God's credit is limited to allowing Beowulf to be successful; it is His power over Fate that is lauded by the narrator.

Similarly, when Beowulf fights Grendel's mother, and Hrunting fails him, the narrator states that "he trusted in his strength, his mighty handgrip" (1533-1534). The value judgement that is implicit in the narrator's comment that follows this objective report is important, for it reveals his positive outlook towards the heroic desire for personal glory. He asserts axiomatically,

Swa sceal man dôn
 þonne he aet guðe gegan þenceð
 longsumne lof; ne ymb his lif cearað.
(1534-1536)

[Thus a man must needs do when he is minded to gain lasting praise in war, nor cares for his life.]

The ambition to "gain lasting praise," to "achieve fame ere death," is central to the poem, and it is in complete contrast to the goal of the hero-saint in Christian poetry. Guthlac, for example, is prepared to suffer any affliction; death does not grieve him because

his "undying part will pass into bliss, where it shall enjoy a fair dwelling" (381-383), not because he is certain that men will praise him for his heroism. Through the example of Guthlac the poet teaches that holy men do not sorrow after death because "they pass into the holy city, and go straight on to Jerusalem, where for ever in joy they can earnestly look upon God's face in peace with their sight" (812-816).

Beowulf, however, cherishes the esteem of men now and their praise of his heroic deeds when he dies. Hrothgar honors him with treasure and says, "Thou hast brought it to pass for thyself by deeds that thy glory shall live forever" (953-955). The narrator describes the victory celebrations in Heorot in great detail, and it is with admiration that he relates that Beowulf "needed not to be ashamed in front of the warriors of the bestowing of gifts" (1025-1026) and that no one could scoff at them (1048). Personal honor and glory are important to the heroic warrior, and treasure is tangible proof of his power. This wealth, Chadwick writes in The Heroic Age,

is desired not so much in order to ensure a life of comfort or even a position of influence, but rather for the sake of display--that the hero may be able to outshine all his rivals in splendour. (441)

Thus Beowulf wishes Hrothgar to send to Hygelac the treasures he has received for his victory over Grendel if he should die in the struggle against Grendel's mother.

Maeg þonne on þaem golde ongitan Geata dryhten,
geseon sunu Hraedles, þonne he on þaet sinc starað,
þaet ic gumcystum godne funde
beaga bryttan, breac þonne moste.

(1484-1487)

[The lord of the Geats may then perceive by that gold, the son of Hrethel may see when he looks upon that treasure, that I found an excellent good giver of rings, that I took joy while I could.]

Treasure is regarded as something which brings joy and which is a meaningful part of the comitatus in which the leader is frequently called the "dispenser of rings."³ In poetry that expresses a clearly Christian outlook, however, treasure is either scorned or given a place of secondary importance. Guthlac, for example, scorns "the idle delights of the eyes, vainglorious dress" (166-167). The Christian warriors in The Fates of the Apostles receive heavenly reward; they scorn "laenan gestreon,/idle aehtwelan" (83-84) [transient treasures, vain riches] and cherish "tir unbraecne" (86) [undying glory] in heaven.

Beowulf, on the other hand, takes delight in treasure. When he swims up from the mere after defeating Grendel's mother, the poet says,

saelace gefeah,
maegenbyrþenne þara þe he him mid haefde.
(1624-1625)

[He took pleasure in the sea booty, in the mighty burden which he bore with him.]

When he and his retainers arrive at Heorot, the narrator says that Beowulf has been "made glorious with fame" (1645). As the Geats are preparing to leave for their homeland, the narrator, in an admiring fashion, describes the hero's triumphant departure:

Him Beowulf þanan,
guðrinc goldwlan graesmoldan traed
since hremig.

(1880-1882)

The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 3, 1801. In this letter, the President discusses the state of the Union and the progress of the government. He mentions the recent election and the inauguration of the new President, James Madison. He also discusses the state of the economy and the progress of the war with France. The letter is a formal and important document, and it is read aloud to the Congress.

The second part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury, dated January 3, 1801. In this report, the Secretary discusses the state of the Treasury and the progress of the government. He mentions the recent election and the inauguration of the new President, James Madison. He also discusses the state of the economy and the progress of the war with France. The report is a formal and important document, and it is read aloud to the Congress.

[Thence Beowulf strode over the grass meadow, the warrior proud of his gold, glorying in treasure.]

The narrator does not rebuke this pride in material splendor; in fact, he indicates that treasure is an integral part of heroic life. It is evident that he clearly approves of Hrothgar's generous rewards for Beowulf's achievements, for he says,

Swa manlice maere þeoden,
hordweard haeleþa heaporaesas geald
mearum ond madmum.

(1046-1048)

[Thus manfully did the famous prince, the treasure-keeper of heroes, reward the rushes of battle with steeds and rich stores.]

One can only conjecture what the narrator's response would have been to Andrew's lack of treasure with which to pay the pilot of the ship which is to carry him to the land of the Mermedonians. Andrew tells the pilot,

Naebbe ic faeted gold ne feohgestreon,
welan ne wiste ne wira gespann,
landes ne locenra beaga, þaet ic þe maege lust ahwettan,
willan in worulde, swa ðu worde becwist.

(301-304)

[I have not plated gold nor treasure, wealth nor food, nor wire ornaments, land nor twisted rings, to stir thy desire, thy worldly wish, which thou speakest of.]

When Beowulf gives the guardian a sword bound with gold in payment for watching over his ship, the narrator states that

...he syðpan waes
on meodubence mapme þy weorþra.
yrfelafe.

(1901-1903)

[afterwards on the mead bench he was the more esteemed for the treasure, the ancient sword.]

Unlike the Christian hero, whose glory is with God, the heroic warrior is eager to distinguish himself by the personal splendor of his deeds and possessions.

That the narrator continues to admire Beowulf's heroic nature after the Geat has returned to Hygelac's court is evident when he summarily gives an account of the events which precede Beowulf's rise to kingship. He praises the man "famous in battle, bold in brave deeds" (2178), and states that "he lived honourably" (2179). It is with complete objectivity, in a matter of fact tone, that the narrator tells how a dragon "began to show his might on the dark nights" (2110-2111). We immediately anticipate Beowulf's engaging in another battle against a monster, partly because of his past achievements, but also in large part because of the Sigemund lay which was sung after the scop had praised Beowulf's exploit against Grendel. Sigemund had won "after his death, not a little fame" (885) by killing a dragon who guarded a treasure "under the grey stone" (887); Beowulf has always been eager to "achieve fame ere death," and now a dragon who guards treasure in a barrow under "a steep rock" (2213) has begun to show his might. Sigemund "had brought it to pass by his valour that he could use the ring-hoard as he chose" (893-895), and now Beowulf has a similar opportunity to win treasure.

The narrator is careful to prepare the way for Beowulf's death, for he says that the hero was then "an aged king" (2209), and we are reminded of Grendel's sudden terror against Hrothgar, who

also was an old ruler. That contemporaries of Beowulf would expect some catastrophe in the dragon's showing his power by night is suggested in the entry for 793 in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

In this year dire portents appeared over Northumbria and sorely frightened the people. They consisted of immense whirlwinds and flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine immediately followed those signs, and a little after that in the same year, on 8 June, the ravages of heathen men miserably destroyed God's church on Lindisfarne, with plunder and slaughter. (36)

Throughout the poem the narrator has emphasized that fate controls men's destinies: "Gaeð a wyrd swa hio scel" (455) [Fate ever goes as it must]. Fate grants or denies success in combat. Good fortune in war is granted to Hrothgar (64); "fate often succours the doomed warrior" (572-573); it is granted to Beowulf to kill nine sea-monsters during his swimming contest with Breca (574-575), he is given glory in battle over Grendel (818-819); and it is granted that Sigemund's sword pierces the dragon (890-891).

The narrator generally regards fate as a negative force, however, only to be forestalled by God (1056). Thus Scyld dies at the appointed hour (26); fate sweeps many of Hrothgar's men away to the dread Grendel (477-478); Hnaef is fated to fall on the Frisian battlefield (1070), and Hildeburh laments her fate (1077). Fate also brings death to Hygelac (1205). After Grendel has been killed and the men are enjoying the banquet, the narrator comments, "They knew not fate, dread destiny, as it had been dealt out to many of the earls" (1233-1235). When the celebrations have come to an end, he says that "one of the revellers, ready and fated, sank to his couch

in the hall" (1240-1241). During Beowulf's report to Hygelac of his exploits, he says that "war was fatal to Hondscio, a violent death to the doomed man" (2076-2077), and significantly, he adds that he was successful against Grendel's mother because "[he] was not yet doomed to death" (2141).

Monsters, too, are under Fate's decree. Thus the narrator declares that Grendel's parting from life at that time was "doomed to be wretched" (805-807). His going from life is fated (846), and "death-doomed" (850), he dives into the mere. Grendel's mother also is "doomed to dwell in the dread water" (1260), and Beowulf's sword, the narrator reports, strikes through her "doomed body" (1568). The dragon who discovers the hoard standing unguarded is fated to become its guardian, for the narrator states,

He gesecean sceall
 (ho)r(d on) hrusan, þær he hæðen gold
 warað wintrum frod; ne byð him wihte ðy sel.
 (2275-2277)

[He must needs seek the hoard in the earth, where, old in years, he holds possession of the pagan gold; nor shall he profit one whit by that.]

The narrator has been painstaking in his endeavor to show how fate is responsible for everything that occurs in the world. His concept of fate is that of the pagan Anglo-Saxon Wyrd, a philosophy of pessimistic determinism. It is with admiration and a sense of tragic awe that the narrator describes the final catastrophe that is to deprive the life of his hero. Beowulf's heroic stance is laudable, and it is with controlled and dignified intensity that the narrator unfolds the drama of the hero's last great accomplishment which is to

assure his lasting reputation among men and to maintain his heroic status.

By beginning and ending his report with the dragon's attacks upon the Geats, the narrator reveals that the motivation for the dragon's rage is of secondary importance to the fact that something must be done to stop it. Some man has entered the barrow and seized a flagon from the hoard, but the narrator distracts our attention from the guilt of the action (if, indeed, it can be considered blameworthy to take treasure from a dragon) by declaring that "he who did him [the dragon] sore hurt did not violate the dragon's hoard eagerly of his own free will" (2221-2222). The man had come upon the treasure by chance, moreover, and the narrator indicates that he was not discovered by the dragon because he was "not destined to fall" (2291).

The dragon ravages Geatland with flames which scorch the land and burn the dwellings. "The loathly air-flier wished not to leave aught living there" (2314-2315), the narrator comments; it destroys Beowulf's dwelling. The feud has progressed and can only be settled by combat. The narrator reveals that he favors Beowulf's cause, when he says that the prince of the Weders gave the dragon requital for his devastation (2336). In addition, the flashbacks which interrupt the narrative emphasize how Beowulf has always acted heroically and lived honorably, and they serve to heighten the suspense. It is with obvious admiration that the narrator tells how Beowulf swims, by his own strength, with thirty suits of armor from the battle against the Frisians in which Hygelac is slain (2359-2368).

The narrator is also careful to make the role of fate in the last encounter very explicit. He says,

Sceolde laendaga
aepeling aergod ende gebidan,
worulde lifes, ond se wrym somod,
peah he hordwelan heolde lange.
(2341-2344)

[The chieftain long famous was fated to endure the end of fleeting days, of life in the world, and the dragon with him, though for long space he had held the treasure store.]

It is fate that is responsible for Beowulf's death in the fight, for the poet says that the hero had survived every fight until the day when he must fight against the dragon (2339-2400). As Beowulf prepares to meet the dragon, he broods on death, and the explanation which is provided is that "fate exceeding near" (2420) was destined to come upon him.

The narrator continues to elicit our admiration for Beowulf when he relates how Beowulf has been a model retainer. Hygelac had no need to pay for some lesser man to avenge the Swedes for slaying Haethcyn, and now Beowulf is prepared to pay the dragon requital for this feud. It is with heroic pride that Beowulf recalls that he slew Daeghrefn so that "he was not able at all to bring adornments, breast ornaments, to the king of the Frisians" (2503-2504). He maintains confidence in his ability, and he seeks to "wage war for the treasure" (2509). That the narrator approves of his intent is made evident in his statement that Beowulf

strengo getruwode
anes mannes; ne bið swylc earges sið!
(2540-2541)

[trusted in the strength of a single man. Such is no coward's venture.]

Fate, however, has decreed that both Beowulf and the dragon should die; the dragon goes striding amid flames, "hastening to his fate" (2570), and Beowulf "for the first time [has] to show his strength without Fate allotting him fame in battle" (2573-2575). Beowulf goes into the fight "mindful of fame" (2678); his sword fails him, however, and fate is held to be responsible:

Him þaet gifeðe ne waes,
þaet him irenna ecge mihton
helpan aet hilde.

(2682-2684)

[It was not granted to him that the edges of swords might aid him in the struggle.]

The narrator objectively reports the outcome of the battle. He does not blame Beowulf for striving to win fame; in fact, he reveals his respect for the aged hero's achievement:

þaet ðam þeodne waes
siðas[t] sigehwile sylfes daedum,
worulde geweorces.

(2709-2711)

[That was the last victory for the prince by his own deeds, the end of his work in the world.]

Beowulf is proud of his having won the great store of jewels, and he wishes to gaze upon them before he dies so that he "may the more easily leave life and land" (2749-2751). His last request is for a barrow to be built as a reminder to his people of his heroic life. The narrator does not at all rebuke the motivating factors in Beowulf's life, "to achieve fame ere death." His reporting of the dragon's death at the hand of Beowulf indicates his high regard for heroic ac-

tion. The dragon, he asserts,

...eorðan gefeoll
 for ðaes hildfruman hondgeweorce.
 Huru þæt on lande lyt manna ðah
 maegenagenda mine gefraege,
 þeah ðe he daeda gehwaes dyrstig waere,
 þæt he wið attorsceaðan oreðe geraesde,
 oððe hringsele hondum styrede,
 gif he waeccende weard onfunde
 buon on beorge.

(2834-2842)

[fell to the earth because of the warrior's handiwork. Few of a truth among men, among those of might in the land, as I have heard, though they were eager for all exploits, have succeeded in rushing against the blast of the venomous foe, or seizing with hands the hall of rings, if they found the guardian on watch dwelling in the barrow.]

Beowulf has succeeded in killing the monster and in winning fame for himself and treasure for his people. Even Wiglaf, who criticizes Beowulf for not heeding the advice of his retainers to leave the dragon alone, says that his lord has avenged himself (2874-2876). That the treasure is buried with Beowulf "where it yet lies, as useless to men as it was before" (3167-3168) does not indicate the narrator's negative attitude towards treasure; it reveals, rather, that gold is meaningful only in the social context, as the elegy of the last survivor (2247-2270) and The Wanderer suggest.

The narrator maintains his respect for Beowulf's heroic action, and he views this last battle as a predestined end to the hero's life. The pursuit of honor, the striving for fame and glory, are set forth as worthy pursuits, for though "every man must forsake fleeting days" (2590-2591), a man can "achieve fame ere death." The narrator has sensed the grandeur of a hero's struggle to fulfil his own heroic nature, a struggle which is tragic only in that fate implacably runs

its course. It is with this realization that the poet declares,

Wundur hwar þonne
 eorl ellenrof ende gefere
 lifgesceafta, þonne leng ne maeg
 mon mid his (ma)gum meduseld buan.
 Swa waes Biowulfe, þa he biorges weard
 sohte searoniðas; seolfa ne cuðe,
 þurh hwaet his worulde gedāl weorðan sceolde.
(3062-3068)

[It is unknown where an earl, mighty in valour, may come to the end of life, when he may no longer sit on the mead bench with his kinsmen. Thus was it with Beowulf, when he sought out the guardian of the barrow and battle; he knew not himself in what way his passing from the world should come about.]

Death might be inevitable for all men, but achieving fame and glory serves to make it meaningful. Beowulf's claim, that to "achieve fame ere death...is best for a noble warrior when life is over" (1387-1389), is made manifest in the barrow which is prepared, "the beacon of the man mighty in battle" (3160); it is evident in the warriors' exaltation of their king's heroic deeds as they ride around the burial mound; but most important of all, it is revealed in the enduring tale of an Anglo-Saxon poet who was impressed by the wondrous actions of a pagan hero.

CONCLUSION

The desire of the heroic warrior to attain fame and glory before death permeates every part of Beowulf and overshadows all the Christian references in the poem. These aspirations, as this thesis has endeavored to prove, are opposed to the outlook expressed in Christian poetry. Critics are wrong to overlook them in their efforts to show that the obviously pagan elements, such as the funeral pyres and burial mounds, which form a part of the story, have been imaginatively transformed in a poem whose perspective they believe to be Christian. Their response to Beowulf has been thwarted, consciously or unconsciously, by an intellectual habit of mind which suggests that a sophisticated interpretation is superior to the more simple appreciation of the qualities of a carefully designed narrative.

Beowulf, however, is not merely based upon "an old Scandinavian tale" as M. W. Bloomfield asserts¹; its poetic substance is centered in the heroic need "to achieve fame ere death," a motivation which is completely antithetical to that espoused in Christian poetry. Alcuin's stern admonition to the abbot of Lindisfarne still holds true in reference to Beowulf:

Let the words of God be read when the monks are at table. That is the place to hear a reader, not a harpist; the sermons of the Fathers, not the songs of the heathen. What has Ingeld to do with Christ? Your house is narrow; it will not be able to hold both of them. The heavenly King does not wish to have communion with the lost pagan kings, even in name; for He reigns in the heavens as King everlasting, while the lost pagan tears his hair in hell. Hear the voices of readers in your houses, not the hubbub of laughing men in your streets.²

"It is clear," as Wm. Whallon so aptly puts it, "that Ingeld and Beowulf never had anything to do with Christ until recently."³

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹Blackburn, "The Christian Coloring in the Beowulf," An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, 1.

²Bloomfield, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth," Anth. Beow. Crit., 163.

³Klaeber, Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg, li.

⁴McNamee, "Beowulf--An Allegory of Salvation?", Anth. Beow. Crit., 332. [Underlining mine.]

⁵Goldsmith, "The Christian Perspective in Beowulf," Anth. Beow. Crit., 379.

⁶By "essential paganism," I mean that the primary motivation of the heroes in the poem is not Christian and that the spirit of the narrative, its moving power as poetry, is inextricably enmeshed in its pagan elements.

Chapter I

¹All quotations in Anglo-Saxon, excluding Beowulf, are from The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records edited by G. P. Krapp and E. K. Dobbie and will henceforth be acknowledged by line numbers only following the text.

²All translations of Anglo-Saxon poems in this thesis are from R. K. Gordon's Anglo-Saxon Poetry.

³Homer, The Odyssey, 353.

⁴Homer, The Iliad, 242.

⁵Ibid.

⁶The problem of the epilogue, which is Christian and homiletic in spirit, is unresolved. I am of the opinion that it has been interpolated and therefore shall include it with the body of heroic poems under discussion.

⁷Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 23.

Chapter II

¹Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 4-5.

²McNamee, "Beowulf--An Allegory of Salvation?", Anth. Beow. Crit., 331-352.

³All quotations from Beowulf in this thesis are from Fr. Klaeber's Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg.

⁴Tacitus, Germania, 285.

⁵Bowra writes, "A hero differs from other men by his peculiar force and energy. Just as the Greeks define him as one who has a special *δύναμις* or power, so in all countries he has an abundant, overflowing, assertive force, which expresses itself in action, especially in violent action, and enables him to do what is beyond ordinary mortals. This is commonly displayed in battle, because battle provides the most searching tests not merely of strength and courage but of resource and decision." (Heroic Poetry, 97)

⁶"Sandhaugar Episode," cited in Chambers' Beowulf. An Introduction to the Study of the Poem. Grettir, in response to Steinvor's comment that he is brave to dare to remain in the house and fight the evil beings, declares, "I do not care to have things all one way" (176).

⁷Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 102.

⁸Andreas, 174-177.

⁹Cf. Grettir's insistence to go to Thorall's farm to fight Glam, in spite of the warnings and pleadings of his kinsman, Jokul (Chambers, 150). A hero's call to adventure is discussed fully in Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 49-58. "Refusal of the summons," Campbell goes on to say in his next section, "converts the adventure into its negative [and]...the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved" (59). Thus Unferth is unheroic because he refuses the call.

¹⁰See Campbell, 172-192; 349-354.

¹¹Campbell explains that the difference between the mythical hero and the hero as saint rests in their antithetical attitudes towards the world and towards personal consciousness. In the section, "The Hero as Saint," he writes: "The ego is burnt out. Like a dead leaf in a breeze, the body continues to move about the earth, but the soul has dissolved already in the ocean of bliss....Beyond life, these heroes are beyond the myth also (354-355).

¹²Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 99.

¹³I completely concur with F. C. Robinson who argues convincingly in his article, "Two Non-Cruces in Beowulf," TSL (1966), 155-158, for maintaining the manuscript reading "naefre" for Klaeber's emendated "naefne," and therefore I have altered both the text and the translation accordingly.

¹⁴Quoted in Dorothy Whitelock's The Audience of Beowulf, 80. References to the armor of God are common in The Bible; see, for example, Isaiah 59:17, Hebrews 4:12, Ephesians 6:11, 14-16.

¹⁵Klaeber, Beowulf, 147.

¹⁶Chadwick, The Heroic Age, 441.

¹⁷Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 50.

¹⁸See Beowulf, 2183-2189.

¹⁹Whallon, "The Idea of God in Beowulf," PMLA (March 1965), 21.

²⁰See also Beowulf, 2076-2080, Beowulf's report to Hygelac. No mention, once again, is made of a loyal man's gaining heavenly reward; instead, Hrothgar pays wergild for the retainer (1053-1055).

²¹Beowulf, 1545-1549.

²²"Godes ondsacan" (233). The foes, warriors in Satan's band, are clearly the enemies of God; whereas in Beowulf, when Grendel is twice referred to as "Godes andsaca" (786, 1682), one feels rather more strongly that he is a physical enemy whom mortals fear.

²³Beowulf, 1533-1536.

²⁴Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 49.

²⁵Rogers, "Beowulf's Three Great Fights," Anth. Beow. Crit., 247.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid. Rogers asserts that in "the second fight Beowulf uses a sword, whereas in the first he trusted in his maegen and in God; this contributes to his difficulties.

²⁸Beowulf, 539-541, 555-558.

²⁹Beowulf, 1547-1549. It is consistent with Beowulf that he intelligently adapts to each new fight. As Bowra comments in Heroic Poetry: "Mere physical strength is hardly ever enough, and the hero who does not back it with skill is of little account" (56).

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³⁰It is noteworthy, too, that the sword belonged to a race of giants who are remembered as being estranged from God (1688-1693). It clearly is no "sword of the spirit."

³¹Beowulf, 1615-1617, 1666-1668.

³²Beowulf, 357, 608, 1397, 1677, 1678, 1791, 1792, 2105, 2111-2114.

³³In "The Idea of God in Beowulf," PMLA (March 1965), Wm. Whallon writes: "All three words--draca, deofol, and haepen--hold certain senses in common, such as an association with the trolls of the march that are the blood and bone of Nordic legend" (21).

³⁴Beowulf, 2508-2509.

³⁵Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 76.

³⁶Goldsmith, "The Christian Perspective in Beowulf," Anth. Beow. Crit., 386.

³⁷Auden, The Portable Greek Reader, 17.

³⁸The narrator's attitude towards fate will be examined more fully in Chapter IV.

³⁹Sisam, The Structure of Beowulf, 57.

⁴⁰Homer, The Odyssey, 353.

⁴¹Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 59.

⁴²Beowulf, 2709-2711.

⁴³Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 130-131.

⁴⁴Beowulf, 863, 1250.

⁴⁵Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 4.

⁴⁶Schücking, "The Ideal of Kingship in Beowulf," Anth. Beow. Crit., 35-49.

Chapter III

¹Tacitus, Germania, 283.

²Hrothgar is often referred to as the protector of his people; for example, lines 269, 371, 428, 456, 609, 663, 1044, 1321, 1866,

2142. This appellation does not carry ironic overtones; it can be regarded as meaningless poetic diction, or it can suggest that Hrothgar is as good a protector of his people as anyone can expect of him. The judgement of his people, "Nor in truth did they blame their friendly lord, gracious Hrothgar, for that was a good king" (862-864), is constantly underscored by the narrator's positive attitude towards the leader of the Danes.

³Whallon, "The Idea of God in Beowulf," PMLA (March 1965), 20.

⁴See Beowulf, 2177-2189; 2208-2209.

⁵Goldsmith, "The Christian Perspective in Beowulf," Anth. Beow. Crit., 383.

Chapter IV

¹Bowra, Heroic Poetry, 4.

²See Beowulf, 928-931, 1397-1398, 1724-1727, 1778-1781.

³See, for example, Beowulf, 35, 352, 1102, 1487.

Conclusion

¹Bloomfield, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth," Anth. Beow. Crit., 163.

²Cited in Whallon's "The Idea of God in Beowulf," PMLA (March 1965), 22.

³Ibid.

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Abbreviations

- JEGP: Journal of English and Germanic Philology
MLN: Modern Language Notes
MLR: Modern Language Review
PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association
PQ: Philological Quarterly
RES: Review of English Studies
TSL: Tennessee Studies in Literature

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